



Security Council

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Letter dated 29 April 2021 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Secretary-General and the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council

I have the honour to enclose herewith a copy of the briefings provided by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Mr. Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Mr. Kevin Rudd, Chair of the Board of Directors of International Peace Institute, as well as the statements delivered by Their Excellencies Mr. Bui Thanh Son, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam; Ms. Eva-Maria Lijmets, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia; Mr. Simon Coveney, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Ireland; Ms. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Permanent Representative of the United States and Member of President Biden's Cabinet; Mr. Jens Frølich Holte, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway; Mr. Sergey Vershinin, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation; Ms. Keisal Peters, Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, as well as by the representatives of China, France, India, Kenya, Mexico, the Niger, Tunisia and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in connection with the video-teleconference on the "Protection of civilians in armed conflict: indispensable civilian objects" convened on Tuesday, 27 April 2021.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members for this video-teleconference, the following delegations and entities submitted written statements, copies of which are also enclosed: Afghanistan, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, the European Union, Guatemala, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Malta, Myanmar, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates.

In accordance with the procedure set out in the letter dated 7 May 2020 from the President of the Security Council addressed to the Permanent Representatives of the members of the Security Council (S/2020/372), which was agreed in the light of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic, these briefings and statements will be issued as an official document of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Dang Dinh Quy**
President of the Security Council



Annex 1**Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock**

The whole world is grappling with the biggest crisis of our lifetime. Our only battle today should be with the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). Now is the moment to end all other conflicts. But wherever violent conflict persists, we must strengthen the protection of civilians.

Over the past 30 years, there has been some progress made to comply with international humanitarian law to protect civilians and the objects they rely on to survive, such as food, medicines, hospitals and water installations. But it has not been enough.

In the past two decades we have seen the emergence of transnational terrorist groups that totally reject the laws of war — groups that use their nihilistic ideologies to justify unspeakable violence against civilians. They do not even pretend to subscribe to the basic humanitarian norms. They regard civilians, including aid workers, as legitimate targets.

At the same time, big military Powers are reorienting their military planning, training and spending to deter and defeat enemy States. And when States and armed groups disrespect or undermine international humanitarian law, other States and non-State actors regard it as an invitation to do the same.

I am deeply concerned about what this means for our ability to protect decades of hard-won progress. I will set out the impact of conflict on four critical areas.

First, let me talk about food. In April, Mr. David Beasley, Mr. Qu Dongyu and I briefed the Security Council (see S/2020/340) on the destructive link between conflict and food security. The impact of armed conflict on food security can be direct, such as the destruction of food stocks and agricultural assets. Attacks on food drive people to move and they disrupt food systems and markets, leaving few able to afford food or access water and fuel to prepare food.

Last year, in Nigeria, an attack on a rice farm in the outskirts of Maiduguri killed more than 110 farmers. The pillaging of food and livestock was widely reported in South Sudan between 2013 and 2020. In Yemen, air strikes and shelling have hit farms, markets, food storage sites and fishing boats. Even now, we hear reports of agricultural inputs and infrastructure in Ethiopia's Tigray region being systematically destroyed in that conflict.

Any attack on food supplies and food infrastructure is unacceptable. I have been reporting to the Security Council on the risk of conflict-induced famine since 2018. And we across the United Nations, together with our non-governmental organization partners, recently warned of the risk of famine looming in Yemen, South Sudan, north-east Nigeria and elsewhere if urgent action is not taken.

Secondly, let me talk about water. In January 2016, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant cut off the water supply to Aleppo governorate in Syria, affecting some 2 million people. Boko Haram is known to have poisoned water sources such as wells and streams, making water use dangerous for both humans and livestock.

Cutting off a safe water supply during conflict causes sanitation and health crises. Even one incident that disrupts the water supply can have enormous health consequences. Evidence shows that even a single brief disruption to a drinking water supply — for just one day — can heighten the risk of contracting water-borne diseases such as cholera. This particularly affects very young children, for whom infection presents the greatest risk of death.

Water and sanitation services are often hit in armed conflicts. In Ukraine and in Libya, fighting has damaged water infrastructure and hindered maintenance, leading to cuts and shortages. Deliberately interrupting or shutting down a water supply is also used as a tactic of war. In South Sudan, Sudan People's Liberation Army soldiers stole pumps that were used by locals in Mboro to pump water from boreholes, thereby depriving them of access to water for both consumption and sanitation.

Thirdly, let me talk about medical care. Violence, attacks and threats against medical care significantly weaken the ability of health systems to function. What I have found particularly hard to stomach are the systematic attacks on medical facilities in Syria. The World Health Organization counted 250 such attacks between 2018 and 2020 alone. These attacks have killed about 1,000 health-care workers over the past decade.

Besides being acts of pure cruelty, these attacks have devastated the Syrian health system. My predecessors and I have appeared regularly before the Security Council to call out these violations and plead on behalf of people trapped in the fighting. In Burkina Faso, ambulances have been burned and health facilities looted. In Mali, equipment and medicine were destroyed or looted and vehicles hijacked.

Attacks have also affected the COVID-19 response. In Libya last year, air strikes and shelling damaged hospitals treating COVID-19 patients. In Yemen, quarantine centres were damaged in hostilities. As a result of these frequent attacks, medical professionals flee and facilities are often forced to close, leaving millions without access to health care. Facilities that do remain open face acute shortages of staff, medicines and supplies. At the end of June last year, only half of 113 Syrian hospitals checked were fully functioning. In March last year, up to 70 per cent of the health workforce had left the country.

Fourthly, we see horrific instances of the use of rape and other sexual violence in the pursuit of political and military goals, and the intentional destruction of the infrastructure that supports survivors. That is what we saw as part of a deliberate effort to force hundreds of thousands of Rohingya out of Myanmar in 2017. I will never forget some of the stories — women I met in Cox's Bazar told me of their experience — of systematically organized rape by men in uniform in front of families and children. It is also what we have seen in the last six months in northern Ethiopia; the rapes there have not stopped. They are deliberately and systematically organized, targeted, ethnically based and intended to terrorize, humiliate and brutalize.

I could give plenty of other examples from what I have seen and heard over the past four years. Sometimes a conflict can produce horrific results due not only to who or what is targeted but where and how it is done. The use of explosive weapons in populated areas exposes large numbers of civilians to the risk of death or injury. When these were used in populated areas last year, 88 per cent of those killed or injured were civilians, as compared to 16 per cent in other areas.

The use of explosive weapons in urban areas also has a devastating toll on essential infrastructure and services. A 2020 study in Yemen showed how the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas has disrupted every resource and system in the country, including water and power supplies, hospitals and sanitation systems. Fewer people want to return if their supply of vital services has been destroyed. Fewer people can.

In an increasingly digitized world, cyberattacks also pose a threat to essential infrastructure. As the Secretary-General has noted, cyberattacks — with their associated impact on health care, electrical and water infrastructure — could become increasingly widespread. Disruption to electricity grids can deprive huge numbers

of people of electrical power. Cyberattacks have jeopardized health-care services in places such as the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, France, Spain and the United States — sometimes forcing operations to be delayed, compromising patient data and disrupting services, including the processing of COVID-19 tests.

Imagine a similar scenario playing out in a country already affected by armed conflict. It would not only have a devastating effect on people in the immediate- and longer-term but would also hamper the humanitarian response.

There are three ways to strengthen the protection of civilians and of objects indispensable to their survival.

The first is to enhance compliance with international humanitarian law. That can be done by better identifying these indispensable objects and regularly updating no-strike lists that include them. We also need to respond to, and learn from, harm to such objects. At the same time, we need to continue to leverage political dialogue, sanctions and arms-transfer decisions in order to ensure respect for the law and the protection of civilians and the objects they depend on to survive.

The second way is to prevent the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects in populated areas, as the Secretary-General has repeatedly called for. Good practices exist — for example, in Afghanistan and Somalia, where multinational forces' use of certain air-delivered weapons has been restricted or their use of artillery and other indirect-fire munitions has been limited. In 2017, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published a compilation of military policy and practice to reduce the humanitarian impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Thirdly, unless there is accountability, miscreants will draw the lesson that serious crime pays. Essentially, what is not punished is incentivized. If war crimes go unpunished, things will get worse. Ensuring accountability for serious violations of international humanitarian law is one of the greatest challenges we face in strengthening the protection of civilians. It is especially important to ensure accountability for serious violations when they are themselves a tactic and a deliberate choice made by perpetrators. As the Secretary-General has said,

“our power in the United Nations is a power of persuasion, is a power of speaking up, denouncing what needs to be denounced. But we cannot order countries to do what they must do.”

We have a robust legal framework governing parties' behaviour in war, and we have a growing body of good practice to put it into motion. All we need now is the political will of Member States and all parties to armed conflict to respect the rules and do the right thing.

Annex 2

Briefing by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross

Today the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) brings a warning to the Security Council: without urgent action to protect essential services in conflict zones, we face a humanitarian disaster on a vast scale. I commend the Council, under the leadership of Viet Nam, for promoting this debate and the accompanying resolution 2573 (2021) in order to bring political attention to this critical operational concern.

Through our work in Aden, Aleppo, Benghazi, Gaza, Homs, Mosul and beyond, the ICRC has become all too familiar with the severe and cumulative impacts on populations when essential services, including electricity, health, education, water and sanitation, are damaged in conflict. The humanitarian consequences are grim, ranging from health crises to displacement to environmental degradation. There is often no safe water to drink, no electricity to power homes and no health services to treat the wounded and sick.

It is those who already face barriers and disadvantages that are the most affected — notably women and children, older people and persons with disabilities. In protracted conflicts, children under 5 are 20 times more likely to die from diseases linked to unsafe water and sanitation than from violence.

The ICRC works in the midst of this suffering. We are present during the long years of war when political solutions are absent, because allowing critical infrastructure to fail is simply not an option. Substituting local authorities for decades with water trucking or providing medical equipment to clinics in remote basements is not an option.

The ICRC is therefore working to prevent the collapse of critical infrastructure that is too big to fail, which would plunge millions into crisis. That means the repair and rehabilitation of infrastructure and the provision of parts, as well as training and capacity-building, to local service providers. In doing so, we seek to mitigate humanitarian consequences, strengthen the resilience of essential services and curb the reversal of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Preventing that damage in the first place, however, is paramount. International humanitarian law provides crucial safeguards aimed at ensuring that essential services continue during armed conflict. Given the enormous suffering of civilians, serious questions are raised as to how parties to conflict are interpreting and concretely applying such obligations, particularly in urban settings.

Those rules include the obligation to refrain from attacking, destroying, removing or otherwise rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and, more generally, the requirement to take constant care to spare the civilian population, civilians and civilian objects from harm in the conduct of military operations and to respect the basic principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. They also include the prohibition of indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks, the requirement to take all feasible precautions in attacks and managing the effects of attacks in order to protect civilians and civilian objects and following the rules that seek to protect the natural environment and limit the damage caused to it. Today I call on the Council to do five things.

First, the Council must ensure that all parties to armed conflict and those who support them make efforts to better respect international humanitarian law. That includes rules on the conduct of hostilities that protect civilians and civilian objects, as well as critical infrastructure that enables the delivery of essential services in order to protect civilian personnel who operate, maintain and repair that infrastructure.

Secondly, the ICRC continues to call for the adoption of an “avoidance policy” regarding the use of heavy explosive weapons in populated areas. Such weapons should not be used against targets in populated areas unless sufficient mitigation measures are taken to reduce the risks to civilians, including measures to limit their wide-area effects. Military manuals, strategies and ground rules need to be adapted to the new realities of urban warfare and an interpretation of the rules of international humanitarian law that does justice not only to military necessity but also the principle of humanity.

Thirdly, we call on all States to ensure that sanctions regimes and counter-terrorism measures comply with international humanitarian law, particularly the rules governing humanitarian activities. Effective mitigating measures, especially lasting and well-framed humanitarian exemptions, must be put in place to enable impartial humanitarian organizations to ensure continuity in the delivery of essential services.

Fourthly, we urge the adoption of measures so that health care and interconnected services such as water, sanitation and electricity are protected to safeguard against public health risks. Frequently, we see infectious diseases, such as cholera epidemics, rip through communities where water and sanitation infrastructure have been destroyed during fighting. Preventable diseases are costing too many lives as epidemics spread beyond the borders of war zones.

Fifthly, we call on States to adopt measures to increase their understanding of the effects of conflict on the natural environment and minimize the impact of military operations on the environment and dependent civilians. Some elements of the natural environment are indispensable for the survival of the civilian population. Damage to critical infrastructure poses a wide range of threats to the environment, which in turn can have devastating environmental health impacts. Climate risks now magnify that harm for dependent communities.

We welcome further discussions with States on all of these recommendations. The ICRC has developed a body of practice-based knowledge to support our expertise in the law. As a humanitarian organization we have been confronted with the limits of the collective humanitarian response in the face of extensive damage and destruction to critical infrastructure, as well as its misuse by parties to conflict.

While humanitarian organizations are adept at directing assistance towards the most vulnerable, the risk posed to populations if an essential service system fails is alarming. When systems fail, the scale of the consequences far exceed what can be addressed by humanitarian action alone.

Recognizing the need to respond at scale has led us to forge new relationships, including with development actors. Together with the World Bank and UNICEF, we have developed a series of joint recommendations for systemic change in a recently released report on water and sanitation, entitled *Joining Forces to Combat Protracted Crises*. Evidently, that does not replace the need for belligerents to prevent the damage, destruction and misuse of critical infrastructure in the first place.

In the face of this pressing situation, my call is for us to work together, and I urge the Council to show leadership so that the suffering of the men, women and children who have lived through the horrors of wars is not compounded.

Annex 3

Briefing by the Chair of the International Peace Institute Board of Directors, Kevin Rudd

I thank you for inviting the International Peace Institute to brief the Security Council on this crucial issue. The International Peace Institute was founded more than 50 years ago in partnership with Secretary-General U Thant and has contributed closely to this matter — both here in New York but also in the field. I also want to acknowledge the leadership of Viet Nam in convening this debate today.

Let me be clear — targeting objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population is prohibited by international law. It is an offence to humanity and an insult to the aspirations of the United Nations and the commitment of its members to peace, development and human rights.

The Council has recalled on several occasions the obligation to protect essential civilian infrastructure, including most recently with the adoption of resolution 2565 (2021), on access to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines. Nonetheless, both deliberate and inadvertent attacks against vital human infrastructure and the natural environment remain a daily reality. That is a shocking indictment of us all, and it is important that the Security Council — as the leading organ for international peace and security — remains seized of it.

Examples of this include the repeated attacks on medical facilities and water infrastructure in Yemen and the central Sahel, the theft of cattle and destruction of sanitation projects in South Sudan, the cutting off of water supplies in Somalia, the detonation of electricity pylons in Afghanistan, the scorching of farmers' fields in Iraq and Mozambique, attacks against humanitarian actors in northern Nigeria and the Niger and cyberattacks against hospitals.

Attacks on essential civilian infrastructure are not confined, however, to a single context or perpetrator. They occur in international and national conflicts, in urban and rural settings, and both intentionally and unintentionally. This a problem that concerns all parties to armed conflict, and we all have a responsibility to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

The targeting of vital infrastructure and natural resources impacts us all — men, women, boys and girls. Most immediately and directly, it disrupts access to essential goods and services. Since the beginning of the year, the World Health Organization has recorded more than 160 attacks against health care — more than one attack per day. In Yemen, more than 40 attacks between 2018 and 2020 damaged water infrastructure, including some managed by humanitarian organizations, thereby restricting water supplies for up to 185,000 households. Such destruction causes food and water shortages, increases prices and exposes the population, especially children, to preventable disease and the risk of malnutrition. It also forces children out of school and generates massive displacement.

That impact is still being felt in many places as natural resources and the means of subsistence are depleted and public services suffer. Those effects are compounded by climate change and environmental degradation, as well as by public health emergencies, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Humanitarian crises turn into development crises, with an urgent need for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure. But in places like Afghanistan and Syria, protracted armed violence constrains the scope for rebuilding. In the long term, attacks on vital infrastructure render the Sustainable Development Goals unattainable for millions.

The resulting destruction and prolonged deprivation also raise the prospects for renewed cycles of violence, thereby generating grievances among affected

populations and accentuating feelings of exclusion. Membership in armed groups sometimes provide the best opportunities for securing a livelihood. This situation creates optimal conditions for recruitment into armed groups and the perpetuation of armed violence.

Ultimately, attacks against vital infrastructure and natural resources trigger a vicious cycle as they undermine the fulfilment of basic human rights, sustainable development and peace.

The United Nations system, in particular the Secretariat, has an important role to play in promoting the protection of vital infrastructure and ensuring a cross-pillar approach between humanitarian, development and peace actors. There are four areas in particular where the United Nations can take action.

The first is prevention. The Secretary-General should use his good offices to engage with all parties to armed conflict, including non-State armed groups, to call for restraint and promote compliance with the laws of war, reminding them that the rule of precaution in attacks requires fighters to spare civilian infrastructure and the natural environment. United Nations peace operations and country teams could support the adoption of national strategies for the protection of civilians, which ought to include the protection of vital civilian objects and the facilitation of humanitarian activities. When possible, prevention should include efforts to foster cooperation around natural resources, especially water diplomacy, in order to turn those natural resources from sources of tension into instruments for peace. The Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire was an important step in that regard.

Secondly, the United Nations itself should ensure that it protects civilian infrastructure, starting by proactively complying with the human rights due diligence policy and ensuring that United Nations peace operations demonstrate human-rights readiness.

Thirdly, the Secretariat — at the request of the Security Council — could consider systematically monitoring attacks against all types of essential infrastructure. To that end, it could consider fostering synergies and expanding the scope of existing mechanisms, including those for monitoring attacks on medical facilities, humanitarian workers and schools. Having a repository of data on attacks against all essential infrastructure would enable the States Members of the United Nations to learn from failures in military operations and to document atrocities. Those are all necessary steps for enhancing prevention and protection in the long run and, eventually, holding perpetrators accountable. Indeed, States must investigate attacks against civilian objects, medical and humanitarian actors and, when necessary, prosecute and secure compensation for affected populations. Unfortunately, too often, parties to conflict fail to open any investigations. We cannot continue to turn a blind eye.

Finally, the United Nations should continue working with international, regional and national partners to coordinate a holistic approach to rehabilitation and reconstruction. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes can help build a comprehensive picture of the direct and indirect of disruptions to essential human infrastructure and natural resources, including their gender dimensions and environmental impacts. This can provide the blueprint for recovery and reconstruction. This reconstruction will require coordination between the humanitarian and development sectors, including through the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration. A cross-pillar approach is necessary to strengthen resilience.

The United Nations, however, cannot successfully promote the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population or support

reconstruction without the political will and efforts of its Member States. I know all too well that as Ministers this task is particularly incumbent on all of you.

The Security Council and its members must take the lead in respecting and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, including by upholding their obligation to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. That is the bare minimum, but it would yield maximum results for the protection of essential infrastructure and for mitigating humanitarian and development impacts in the long run.

Should the Council decide to adopt an overarching decision addressing the holistic protection of such objects, it should ensure that this decision remains consistent with international law. Further, it should safeguard a space for humanitarian actors to operate without constraints in all its future decisions, including as they relate to counter-terrorism and sanctions.

The Council should also recall that natural resources are shared and can be powerful instruments for cooperation. The protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population is at the centre of the role of the United Nations system and its members in promoting respect for human rights, sustainable development and peace.

Annex 4**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam, Bui Thanh Son**

I wish to thank Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Rudd and Mr. Maurer for their insightful and very practical briefings.

We often measure the consequences of conflicts in numbers of direct victims of violence, but the indirect and longer-term impacts of widespread damage to basic infrastructure are equally destructive. For instance, in protracted conflicts, children are much more likely to die from diseases linked to unsafe water and sanitation than from conflict-related violence.

Viet Nam knows this first-hand. Decades of wars left us with little intact. Schools, hospitals, roads, power grids, water and sanitation systems were destroyed, and farmlands and the environment were contaminated.

Unfortunately, history keeps repeating itself. Crises have been unfolding across regions, from the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Libya, to Afghanistan, Yemen and Syria. Left without basic infrastructure and essential services, millions of people, particularly women and children, are displaced and subject to hunger, disease and a grim prospect of return, resettlement and recovery. The impact of the destruction of basic infrastructure persists far beyond the end of conflicts, thus hampering the sustainable development of communities and nations.

The protection of civilians has been at the forefront of the work of the Security Council. But more often than not, the Council's discussions have focused on protecting the people, with little attention paid to securing the means for their survival.

The open debate today is therefore a good opportunity for the Council to deliberate this issue at a thematic level, and I hope this is only the beginning. It is critical that the Council develop a strategy to effectively protect infrastructure and objects critical for the survival of civilians in armed conflict. Such a strategy must be comprehensive and holistic and must be based on compliance and partnerships. Let me elaborate.

First, the Council must put an emphasis on compliance. All parties to conflicts, especially Member States, must adhere to the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. They must comply with international humanitarian law, particularly the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution, as well as the prohibition of attacking or destroying objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Parties must fully take into account the ensuing longer-term impacts of damaged infrastructure on the survival of civilians and the environment.

Secondly, basic infrastructure is, by nature, interlinked. The destruction of power generation and grids, for instance, can render useless water and sanitation facilities, which then affects the operation of hospitals and food facilities.

It is therefore vital that the Council consider the interconnected nature of objects and ensure that measures be put in place to protect entire systems, not only individual objects. It is equally important to protect the personnel essential for the operation of those systems and to ensure that the materials and equipment needed for their maintenance and repair can reach their destinations.

Thirdly, cooperation and partnership remain key in supporting recovery and building resilience for civilians in armed conflicts. The Council should encourage and facilitate closer coordination between Member States, international organizations and humanitarian and development partners in post-conflict peacebuilding,

especially in efforts to rebuild basic infrastructure and restore essential services to civilians. That could play a crucial role in saving the lives of civilians and providing them long-term support.

Finally, the best way to protect civilians is to prevent conflicts. The root causes of conflicts, including poverty, injustice, power politics and disregard for international law, must be addressed. The implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals should continue to guide national and international efforts to leave no one behind.

Resolution 2573 (2021), submitted by Viet Nam and to be adopted at the end of today's meeting, provides the core of such a strategy. It is my expectation that it will carry the protection-of-civilians agenda forward in a more sustainable way in order to cope with an increasingly turbulent world. We thank the States Members of the United Nations for their tremendous support during the negotiation of the text.

Peace may mean many different things, but for civilians, peace takes shape in the most fundamental items: food, water, sanitation, health care and education. Our discussion today has addressed the very core of peace in the eyes of civilians.

It is time that the global community, beginning with the Security Council, brings our efforts closer to the needs of those stranded in the devastation of wars. It is time we put in place an approach that is holistic and resilient in order to create a foundation for sustainable peace and development.

Annex 5**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Estonia,
Eva-Maria Liimets**

I extend warm greetings to you, Mr. President, and to the people of Viet Nam. I also welcome the participation of Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and Mr. Rudd in this meeting and thank them for their insightful briefings.

We welcome today's topic of discussion. Estonia has placed the rules-based international order and compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, at the centre of its work here in the Security Council.

At the outset, it is important to note that it is the primary responsibility of States to ensure the protection of their population. That includes the protection afforded under international humanitarian law to objects essential to the survival of the civilian population, such as food, water and medical supplies.

Unfortunately, in the course of the work of the Security Council, as we continue to learn about cases of non-compliance, we are reminded time and time again that the normative framework for the protection of civilians is too often not upheld in real life.

The pandemic also adds a new layer of risks. I reiterate Estonia's support for the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and for resolution 2565 (2021), which we unanimously adopted in February.

Civilians, including the most vulnerable — women, children and adolescents, continue to be disproportionately affected by conflict.

I recall the situation in Ukraine, with 1.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) forced to leave their homes, and note too the 2 million IDPs in the Sudan and the 6.2 million IDPs in Syria. The return and resettlement of displaced communities is often hindered by the destruction of essential objects and the disruption of essential services.

Although the Security Council has condemned the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, more needs to be done to help people on the ground.

The conflict in the Tigray region in Ethiopia has forced 1.7 million people to leave their homes in search of protection and food. Considering the ongoing fighting it will be impossible to plant seeds for the next season. That will food security even more challenging in the long-term.

In Afghanistan, due to poverty, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing conflict, almost half of the children under 5 suffer from acute malnutrition. In March, 17 million people were at the highest levels of food insecurity — the second-worst situation of this kind in the world.

We are not doing enough. On an international level, due attention also needs to be paid to new elements — the increasing urbanization of armed conflicts, climate change and the environmental consequences of armed conflict. New technologies can help to find ways to improve humanitarian assistance.

At the same time, we keep seeing malicious cyberactivities targeting critical civilian infrastructure, including electricity, water, sanitation and health care. As we have said in the Council, international law also applies in cyberspace. Obligations deriving from international humanitarian law govern States' activities in conflict in order to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure. Law acts to constrain, not facilitate conflict.

In building back better after the pandemic, it will be crucial to strengthen the resilience of both indispensable objects and essential services, including through cyber-related capacity-building. I am confident that cybersecurity needs to be part of both conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

The urgent action we must take is twofold.

First, States must strengthen their capacity to more effectively protect civilians in times of war. National and United Nations staff need to be trained in international humanitarian law, which has been shown to yield positive results.

Secondly, we have to make sure that no one is above the law. No perpetrator should escape justice. It is the responsibility of States to exercise criminal jurisdiction over those responsible for international crimes, and to have relevant national legislation in place.

When States fail to meet that responsibility, the international community and the Security Council must step in. The Council needs to fulfil its mandate to stop atrocities and restore justice. The Council's inaction in situations where atrocities are committed speaks volumes. I urge the Security Council to make use of its ability to refer cases to the International Criminal Court, when necessary.

Finally, let me assure you that Estonia remains committed to the protection of civilians through its actions at the national, regional and international levels, including here in the Council. I wish you every success in raising awareness through this debate on the crucial need for the protection of civilians and essential objects during conflict.

Annex 6**Statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Ireland, Simon Coveney**

I thank Viet Nam for organizing today's debate on this important topic. I also want to thank Mark Lowcock, Peter Maurer and Kevin Rudd for sharing their expert testimony with us.

It has been 22 years since the Security Council adopted the protection-of-civilians agenda through resolution 1265 (1999). Since then, the Council has developed a culture of protection that recognizes the interconnected nature of the risks to civilians in armed conflict.

I welcome the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021) on this critical issue, which, tragically, we are now addressing with increasing regularity.

The destruction of, or damage to, indispensable civilian objects, including food, water, sanitation, health care and education systems — and the critical information infrastructure that underpins them — has devastating effects. More civilians die from such indirect causes of conflict than from the violence itself. We know, too, that the impacts can last for generations, making paths to peace and the rebuilding of societies even more challenging.

It should not be this way. International law has long prohibited attacks against objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations, so it is a damning indictment of our world that the Council has to remind parties to conflicts of that prohibition and plead with them not to deprive civilian populations of food, water and the basic infrastructure they need for daily existence. We must therefore ask ourselves what we can do to better protect civilians and the essential services they need in situations of armed conflict.

I would like to focus today on three specific points in that regard.

First, we need to support food systems and provide food security. Resolution 2417 (2018), unanimously adopted by the Council, is clear on the linkages between conflict, the destruction of civilian objects and food insecurity. During conflict, the destruction of the assets on which agricultural production and livelihoods are built not only produces hunger but can also be a driver of long-term displacement and other destabilizing consequences.

When mills, farms, homesteads and granaries are demolished; when crops, pastures, and livestock are seized and burned; when water sources are destroyed or defiled, we are on a path to starvation, famine and forced migration.

Starvation of civilians is a method of combat and it needs to be prohibited. We have a clear responsibility, therefore, to protect civilian objects that act as a bulwark against famine. An added dimension, as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) points out, is that the climate crisis now defines how conflict-affected communities experience their natural environment. This convergence of climate crisis, environmental degradation and armed conflict is likely to have deep and long-term humanitarian consequences.

Secondly, the detrimental health effects of conflict are exacerbated by the obscene practice of attacking medical facilities and personnel. The indispensable nature of medical facilities, medical assets and health-care workers in times of conflict cannot be overstated. Their protected status in armed conflict is unequivocally enshrined in international humanitarian law.

Yet, we have witnessed the grotesque scenario of doctors in Aleppo forced to work in underground tunnels. Médecins Sans Frontières and the ICRC report

frequent attacks on medical facilities and medical workers, including recently in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Attacks on medical facilities have become too common and the previous Secretary-General rightly said that “when so-called surgical strikes end up hitting surgical wards, something is deeply wrong” (*S/PV.7685, p. 3*).

Attacks on medical infrastructure deprive the sick, the wounded, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, the old and the young of their most fundamental dignity and of vital care and assistance when they perhaps need it the most.

We are also increasingly concerned that cyberoperations are becoming a part of conflict that can disrupt the operation of critical infrastructure and vital services to civilians, including in health and medical facilities that are vulnerable to cyberattacks.

The destruction and occupation of schools by armed forces represents an attack on children and our collective future. That is especially true in protracted conflicts such as those in Syria and Yemen, where a generation of children is being deprived of an education. These children are growing up denied the skills they need to contribute to their countries and economies, thereby exacerbating already desperate situations. We must redouble our efforts to prevent the destruction of schools and hospitals in conflicts.

Thirdly, with regard to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, Ireland remains gravely concerned about their impact and the civilian harm caused during active hostilities in populated areas.

Year after year, the Secretary-General reports that over 90 per cent of those killed and injured by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas are civilians. It is well documented that the manner in which explosive weapons are used in populated areas has devastating short and long-term effects. The widespread loss of life and the physical and psychological injuries inflicted on civilians are simply unacceptable.

Of particular relevance to today’s discussion is the effect of explosive weapons in populated areas on critical infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and sanitation facilities. That infrastructure is vital for meeting immediate humanitarian needs and for post-conflict development.

It is for those reasons that Ireland is leading negotiations in Geneva on a political declaration to address the humanitarian consequences arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Good progress has been made and we are determined to finalize a declaration that will result in positive change. I hope I can count on colleagues to support us in doing that.

Finally, I would like to make brief reference to the need to protect cultural property in armed conflict. The legal basis for protection is strong, but the need for protection is unquestionable. War is the enemy of art, culture, monuments and our cultural heritage. Cultural property reflects the identity of a people, its culture and its heritage, and preserving it — by rebuilding destroyed communities — can be an important element of the pathway to peace.

The terrible suffering inflicted on civilians would be significantly reduced if parties to conflict complied with their obligations under international law. A pressing challenge remains ensuring accountability for serious violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. The Security Council has a role in calling out those States and actors that are failing to live up to their obligations and legal responsibilities, as well as moral responsibilities. When the Council does not do so, we must be ready to accept that their failure is also partly our responsibility.

Annex 7**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States of America and Member of President Biden's Cabinet, Linda Thomas-Greenfield**

I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam for bringing this important aspect of the protection of civilians agenda to the centre of the Security Council's attention. We welcome Viet Nam's efforts on resolution 2573 (2021), which accompanies this open debate, and we were proud to support it. I would also like to thank our briefers for their comprehensive and honest accounting of the challenge of protecting civilian infrastructure in conflict situations.

Our charge — to advance peace and security — has to put people first. Their lives, their dignity, their well-being — that is what we are here to protect. And although we have not spoken at such length about the specific issue of civilian infrastructure before, I am glad we are doing so now because it is not hyperbole to say that every person in the world relies on their civilian infrastructure system. But far too often, armed actors target these basic services. We must make a point of holding them accountable, especially when they violate international humanitarian law.

Imagine if your farm was intentionally destroyed, your water pipes intentionally contaminated or damaged, your community health facility targeted for bombing. Imagine if civilians were then forced to leave their homes and communities to find electricity, running water or adequate food supplies in an often arduous and too often deadly search.

This is not hypothetical; it is happening right now in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. There, fighting has resulted in decimated civilian communications systems, failed electrical grids and looted and destroyed protected hospitals. To meet their basic needs, the people of Tigray have been forced to flee and travel long distances, often facing threats of violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence. This is simply intolerable. There must be an immediate cessation of hostilities in Tigray.

During conflicts, schools and other public buildings are essential as places for children to stay safe. Those buildings can serve as shelters, spaces for communities to reconnect or as sites for distributing aid and services. So, when these essential, protected buildings are deliberately targeted, it has a unique and devastating impact on women, caregivers and families. When armed actors occupy a health centre, women and girls who need maternal care often die as a result.

Again, this is not hypothetical, it is happening right now in Syria, where the Al-Assad regime — with documented help from Russia — has devastated the country's civilian infrastructure and displaced over half the population through its campaign of atrocities. They have attacked and destroyed protected schools, hospitals, markets, residential communities and places of worship. We saw this regime's depravity as recently as 21 March, when the Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital in Aleppo was destroyed. Sixteen people, mostly medical staff, were injured. Six patients, including a child, were killed.

When civilian infrastructure is intentionally targeted, humanitarian actors also often bear the brunt. When roads and bridges are destroyed, when health facilities are targeted for bombings, the capacity to deliver much-needed relief and supplies to those in dire circumstances is diminished or denied.

And sadly, that is exactly what is happening right now in Yemen, where violence inflicted by all parties to the conflict has destroyed schools, hospitals and markets. The World Health Organization recorded 142 attacks on health facilities alone from March 2015 to March 2020. Yemen is the world's worst humanitarian

crisis. But the humanitarians who are trying to help — the do-gooders risking life and limb to save others — are being blocked by attacks on basic infrastructure. This is horrific, and it is wrong. And we must protect civilians by demonstrating that we will hold bad actors to account when they violate international humanitarian law.

So today let us recall our duty. The Charter of the United Nations demands that we maintain international peace and security. That means protecting civilians and the systems and infrastructure that serve as their lifelines.

Annex 8**Statement by the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Norway,
Jens Frølich Holte**

We would like to thank Viet Nam for hosting this debate and the briefers for setting the stage. The destruction of civilian infrastructure has devastating consequences for the civilian population, and we welcome resolution 2573 (2021), adopted today.

The protracted nature of today's conflicts, the impact of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and the malicious use of new technologies exacerbate this problem. We have seen all too clearly that the failure to protect civilians and critical civilian infrastructure has immediate humanitarian ramifications for, as well as long-term impacts on, individuals and communities.

Protecting schools and universities is essential. The right to education must be upheld in peacetime and armed conflict alike. Education protects children and young people from a wide range of violations and threats to their health and lives, including sexual and gender-based violence and recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. Increasingly, educational facilities are being attacked or used for military purposes. This is an unacceptable and dangerous trend, which hinders safe access to and the enjoyment of the right to education. We must all take steps to strengthen the protection of education amid conflict. We therefore encourage all States to join the 107 that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration and are working together to implement it.

Attacks on health-care facilities, personnel and their means of transport are unacceptable. Facilities are being destroyed, and patients and staff killed, maimed or displaced. The destruction of water and electricity systems affects the health of the population and the quality of health services. Essential services crumble and disappear. As the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has demonstrated, this has an immediate effect on individuals and their communities, and a global impact on health. Now more than ever, we must ensure the protection of health infrastructure, including to be able to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and similar outbreaks in the future. We call for the full implementation of resolutions 2286 (2016) and 2565 (2021).

We must strengthen the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. We support Ireland's leadership in negotiating what we hope will be a strong political declaration — a declaration that will encourage parties to conflict to minimize the use of such weapons and develop policies and practices that will strengthen implementation of international humanitarian law and increase the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

The destruction of infrastructure leads to environmental degradation. Syria, with damage to oil refineries and the destruction of water and waste-management systems; Yemen, with the destruction of water and sanitation facilities; and Tigray, where farmland is scorched to cinders, are all examples of destruction that causes long-term damage to the environment.

In many conflict-affected areas, environmental degradation, coupled with the impacts of climate change, has a devastating effect on food security, health and livelihoods. In this context, the International Committee of the Red Cross Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict are a useful tool, which identifies a range of concrete measures. Recognizing the scale and consequence of this issue, we welcome the opportunity to discuss it in the Security Council.

We recall resolution 2417 (2018), which links armed conflict, conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine and call on all parties to spare infrastructure needed for food production and distribution. The intentional use of the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is a war crime. We urge States parties to the Rome Statute to ratify the recent amendment concerning the war crime of starvation in non-international armed conflict.

Hostile cyberoperations conducted in armed conflict pose a serious threat to objects indispensable to the survival of, and delivery of essential services to, the civilian population. We reaffirm that international humanitarian law applies in this regard.

Fundamentally, in order to truly protect civilian populations, all parties to armed conflicts must fully respect and implement their obligations under international humanitarian law. Impunity for any violations must end. All States must investigate, within their jurisdiction, attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Those responsible must be held to account.

We hope to come away from this discussion with joint recognition of the need to support humanitarian rehabilitation of infrastructure. Humanitarian action to maintain and repair indispensable civilian objects and infrastructure is crucial to the survival of the civilian population. Strengthening the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is also an important part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including those on health, education, food security, peace and justice.

The protection during a conflict of civilians and civilian infrastructure that delivers essential services can determine the prospects for achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation. It will affect the ability to ensure the voluntary and dignified return and reintegration of displaced persons, and to prevent conflict from recurring. We recall the words of Secretary-General Guterres in the 2018 debate on protection of civilians: “[P]rotecting civilians in conflict is ... the only way to lay the foundation for sustained peace” (*S/PV.8264, p.3*). To sum it up, only if protection succeeds, can peace succeed.

Annex 9**Statement by Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Vershinin**

[Original: Russian]

At the outset, let me express appreciation to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, Mr. Bui Thanh Son, for convening this Security Council debate on a truly pressing topic: “Protection of civilians in armed conflict: indispensable civilian objects”.

We are also thankful to the Vietnamese Mission for drafting a balanced thematic text in resolution 2573 (2021). The document generally reflects the endorsed approaches of the international community to the issue under discussion today.

The protection of civilian infrastructure in armed conflict is an inalienable component of international humanitarian law. In particular, the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Protocols Additional address this issue. A number of previously adopted Security Council resolutions also touch upon this question, including resolution 2417 (2018), on the protection of civilians.

We proceed from the understanding that any deliberate attacks on civilian populations or indispensable civilian facilities are unacceptable. Such facilities include food stocks, crops, livestock, drinking water and irrigation facilities, as well as other elements of critical infrastructure. Let me stress that, under international humanitarian law, all sides to armed conflicts must differentiate between civilian population and combatants, as well as between civil and military facilities. The international community needs to cooperate in order to restore damaged infrastructure and provide timely assistance to conflict-affected countries. We believe the United Nations, alongside other international and regional organizations, plays an important role in this regard. However, such assistance should only be rendered at the request of the State affected.

In this context, we would like specifically to highlight the state of affairs in Syria, which was already mentioned during this debate. The current situation in that country clearly illustrates that Syrians need urgent help in restoring critical civil infrastructure, and comprehensive assistance, free of politicization or preconditions.

Despite some relevant stability on the ground, the humanitarian situation in Syria has dangerously deteriorated against the backdrop of a prolonged conflict, economic crisis, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the unilateral sanctions imposed against Syrians by the United States of America and the European Union. As per data provided by humanitarian agencies operating on the ground in Syria, the production of energy has dropped by 70 per cent and that of drinking water by 30-40 per cent, while the number of irrigation facilities has decreased by half as compared to the year 2011. Apparently, the outage of critical water and energy infrastructure will have devastating effects on millions of Syrians — from risks of epidemics and environmental disasters to another mass migration. This is to say nothing of constructing residential buildings and renovating schools and hospitals — activities critical in terms of creating appropriate conditions for the return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

The devastating effect of unilateral sanctions is worth making a separate point. Not only are they inflicting a humanitarian disaster on ordinary Syrians, but they deliberately provoke negative consequences for specialized agencies, obstructing financial transactions and the import of medicines and spare parts to Syria. Here is one outcome — whereas before the war Syria used to manufacture most medicines

at home and export them to 23 countries, it is now almost completely dependent on external medical aid deliveries.

Anti-Syrian sanctions are getting worse even though the Secretary-General called for restrictions to be waived amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to United Nations data, 90 per cent of the Syrian population lives below the poverty line, and 70 per cent have no access to food. At the same time, the restrictions do not prevent the Americans who occupy oilfields and farmland in the north-east of Syria from stepping up smuggling and illegal trade in oil and grains.

Another noteworthy fact is that Western sanctions cover not only the trans-Euphrates region, but also Idlib, which is known to be under the control of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which the Security Council has listed as a terrorist group. Western States call for enhanced humanitarian deliveries to these areas, over which Damascus has no control — and, what is more, to do so via the cross-border mechanism rather than through the Syrian Government, even though that mechanism undermines the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria, as well as the guiding principles of humanitarian assistance stipulated in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

We call on the responsible members of the international community to join Russia's broad humanitarian efforts in mine action, restoring educational and medical facilities and residential buildings, reconstructing roads and electric lines, and providing food and medical assistance.

We express our deep appreciation to the International Red Cross Committee and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as relevant national societies. Impartial humanitarian assistance deserves the highest praise. Russia continues its cooperation with such bodies, in particular by sponsoring programmes in Syria, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine.

Annex 10**Statement by the Minister of State with the Responsibility for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Keisal M. Peters**

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines thanks Viet Nam for convening this timely open debate, and, furthermore, we extend our gratitude to the briefers for their insightful remarks.

The prohibition against the attack, destruction, removal or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population remains a core tenet of international humanitarian law, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions. Military objectives should never take precedence over the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Far too often, State and non-State actors alike have violated well established principles of the law of armed conflict, particularly those of distinction, proportionality and precaution.

Sanctions and ill-designed counter-terrorism measures continue to stymie both development and humanitarian access in many locales, bringing untold suffering upon the local population in an attempt to achieve narrow political objectives. To be sure, counter-terrorism operations are sometimes necessary to protect people and preserve a country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity. However, both sanctions and counter-terrorism measures must comply with all principles of international humanitarian law and international human-rights law.

The socioeconomic impact of armed conflict often gives rise to perilous humanitarian crises. When coupled with climate change, severe weather events and environmental degradation, these conflicts have a dramatic impact on civilians, particularly women and children, and extend further, impeding the overall recovery of the countries affected.

We have seen the reality of these effects across protracted conflicts on the Security Council agenda. In Yemen, the health system is crippled, leaving half of the facilities operational, rendering the country ill-equipped to combat the coronavirus disease pandemic. A similarly grave situation exists in Syria, where 10 years of war have left over 13 million Syrians in need of multidimensional forms of humanitarian assistance, including shelter, following mass displacements, and basic health care. In conflict-affected areas of Somalia, water and sanitation infrastructure have been destroyed, reducing access to clean water and increasing the risk of preventable diseases, such as cholera. The destruction that occurs as a result of deliberate and indiscriminate attacks hinders efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The destruction of resources needed for civilian life, living and production is causing unbearable suffering for too many people around the world. It is only through staunch compliance with the principles of international law that civilians and civilian infrastructure will be afforded the protection they rightly deserve. We call on all parties to conflict to safeguard water stations, health-care facilities and other essential infrastructure necessary to reduce vulnerabilities and promote development. The rehabilitation of infrastructure already devastated must also be prioritized to alleviate dire humanitarian situations. In this regard, we continue to encourage the international community to contribute to the restoration of critical infrastructure in countries affected by armed conflict, without which millions will be forced to remain dependent on humanitarian assistance for basic necessities. Reconstruction is also a necessary element, which facilitates the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their places of origin.

Acts committed in violation of international law must not be tolerated under any circumstances and must be met with condemnation from the international community. The link between justice and peace has long been recognized. As such, we reiterate our call for the perpetrators of these abhorrent acts to be held accountable.

Civilians across the globe have suffered as a result of geopolitical dynamics over which they have neither influence nor control. We therefore call on parties to conflicts to demonstrate the political will required to achieve lasting peace and stability. The Council has a responsibility to advocate for the victims of armed conflict. We must continue to raise our voices to ensure their protection and to make certain that the international community honours its legal and moral responsibilities to safeguard the survival of people impacted by conflicts around the world.

Annex 11**Statement by the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations, Zhang Jun**

[Original: Chinese and English]

China welcomes Your Excellency as President of the Security Council meeting again and appreciates Viet Nam's initiative in convening this open debate and its careful preparations. We hope that the Council will adopt draft resolution S/2021/402 on this issue. I also would like to thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, President Peter Maurer and Chairman Kevin Rudd for their briefings. Their views and recommendations will help the Council better discuss and address this important issue.

Civilians bear the brunt of armed conflict. Infrastructure for agriculture production, food security, water, power supplies and health care, among other installations, are essential for ensuring the subsistence of civilians and improving the humanitarian situation. The protection of these facilities is an explicit requirement of international humanitarian law. In the context of the current global pandemic, it is all the more important and a shared priority for the international community to ensure accessibility and the safety of medical facilities for conflict-affected civilians.

China supports the draft resolution prepared by Viet Nam and actively participated in the discussions and consultations with other members. The draft resolution calls for addressing the root causes of conflict, ensuring the functionality of infrastructure in conflict-affected countries, enhancing efforts to promote post-pandemic recovery and facilitating sustained peace, and welcomes international and regional cooperation in this regard. These are constructive and practical elements. The international community should adhere to the people-centred approach, addressing both symptoms and root causes, and take effective and concrete actions to push for a peace process, and create conditions for the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

First of all, we must stick to the concept of systemic governance and address the root causes of conflict through relentless efforts. Armed conflicts bring systemic risks to civilians. No egg remains unbroken in an overturned nest. In the event of a conflict or war, it is difficult to ensure absolute security for civilians and civilian objects. To solve this problem, we must look at the big picture and address its root causes. The vast majority of armed conflicts result from extreme poverty and the scarcity of resources. The promotion of development for peace is the fundamental way out of this conundrum. The international community should coordinate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to help conflict-affected countries and regions meet the challenges in poverty reduction and pandemic control, thereby gradually eliminating the root causes of conflict.

Secondly, we must adhere to peaceful solutions to conflicts through dialogue, good offices and negotiations. At present, multiple hot-spot issues on the Security Council's agenda are at a critical stage. The international community should seize the opportunity to support dialogue and consultation, strengthen mediation and good offices, intensify diplomatic efforts and prevent the escalation of tensions, so as to free civilians from the ordeal of war at an early date. The Security Council and other United Nations bodies should play a coordinating role and support regional organizations that have the advantage of finding regional solutions to regional disputes, so as to forge a synergy for promoting talks for peace. All parties to conflict should respond positively to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire and take forward the political process through inclusive dialogue.

Thirdly, we must help host countries strengthen capacity-building on the basis of clearly defined responsibilities. The Governments of conflict-affected countries should assume the primary responsibility for the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. All parties to conflict must fulfil their obligations under international law to protect civilians and civilian objects, correctly distinguish between military and civilian objects, ensure the functioning of infrastructure and prioritize the needs of vulnerable groups, such as women and children. The international community should respect the sovereignty of host countries, focus on their needs, hear their views and help them build their capacity to operate and protect infrastructure on their own. We must be alert to terrorist forces that try to control or destroy infrastructure or even launch cyberattacks on critical infrastructure by using digital technology.

The international community should work together to protect civilians and civilian objects and ensure civilians' sustainable access to essential services. The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Peacebuilding Commission and the United Nations resident offices should, in accordance with their respective mandates, bring into play their own advantages and strengthen coordination with regional organizations and international bodies, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, to shift the focus of humanitarian relief and development assistance towards civilians and civilian objects, and play a bigger role in post-conflict reconstruction. Member States can also make their own contributions. In this regard, China is ready to share its experience.

Over the years, by aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with the 2030 Agenda, China has deepened cooperation with relevant national, regional and international organizations to help developing countries build up their infrastructure, boost employment and improve people's livelihoods. China has helped build 24 agricultural technology demonstration centres in Africa, benefiting more than 500,000 local people. The development sub-fund under the United Nations peace and development trust fund has implemented 34 projects, involving multiple United Nations agencies, benefiting dozens of countries. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus disease, China has provided emergency medical assistance to several conflict-affected countries and dispatched medical teams to help them fight the pandemic. Looking forward, China will continue to work with the international community to help conflict-affected countries build their capacity for independent development and for the protection of civilians.

Annex 12**Statement by the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations, Nicolas de Rivière**

[Original: French]

I thank Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and Mr. Rudd for their briefings. I would like to focus on three points.

As you have all pointed out, armed conflict has a devastating impact on the civilian infrastructure that is essential to the survival of populations. I am thinking in particular of hospitals and medical facilities, facilities providing access to water and electricity, as well as crops and agricultural infrastructure. Civilian populations, particularly in Syria, Yemen, the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, are paying the price every day: increased humanitarian needs and food insecurity, displacement and the spread of epidemics.

Some parties to conflict even go so far as to knowingly incorporate violations of international humanitarian law into their military strategy in order to deprive the population of all relief and to ensure their surrender. That is unacceptable, and it is up to the Security Council to clearly and regularly reaffirm that.

Even war has rules. Respect for international humanitarian law is not an option; it is an obligation imposed on everyone. Our collective responsibility is to find the operational means to ensure that law is respected.

That is the meaning of the Call for Humanitarian Action, launched by France and Germany in 2019 and now endorsed by 47 Member States and the European Union. That call identifies concrete actions that States can take to strengthen respect for international humanitarian law, and we call on all our partners to support that call.

We also call on countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

Every State has a responsibility to guarantee respect for international humanitarian law: I am thinking in particular of training. Last year, France finalized its national training plan on international humanitarian law, which targets all French actors: the military, diplomats and senior officials. This plan also provides for training activities for our foreign partners. We are doing this in particular in the Sahel.

Thirdly, we must strengthen the fight against impunity. The perpetrators of violations of international humanitarian law must be brought to justice. I recall that the use of starvation against civilians as a method of warfare and attacks on hospitals and medical facilities constitute war crimes.

France will continue to fully support mechanisms to fight impunity. We must strengthen national capacities to conduct impartial and independent investigations and, where national mechanisms are insufficient or inadequate, support the use of international mechanisms. France reiterates its call for the universalization of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. We must also more systematically sanction the perpetrators of serious violations of international humanitarian law within the framework of the United Nations and European sanctions regimes.

Lastly, I would like to commend the Vietnamese initiative for a Security Council resolution on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Respect for international law is a key priority for our diplomacy, and we will remain particularly vigilant on those issues, which are, in the true sense, vital.

Annex 13**Statement by the Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, T.S. Tirumurti**

At the outset, let me begin by thanking the His Excellency Foreign Minister of Viet Nam and the Vietnamese delegation for organizing this open debate on this important issue. I also thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, International Committee of the Red Cross President Peter Maurer and the Honourable Kevin Rudd, Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute, for their briefings. These briefings have been useful in understanding the impact of the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population in situations of armed conflict. India also thanks Viet Nam for successfully steering draft resolution S/2021/402 on this subject.

The primary responsibility of meeting the protection needs of populations, including the maintenance of essential services, rests with national Governments. However, over decades of practice and shaped by the searing experience of destructive wars, we now have a set of international principles and jurisprudence that places equal responsibility on the aggressor to ensure that civilians and civilian infrastructure not be targeted in armed conflicts.

History has shown us that the killing of civilians and the devastation of civilian infrastructure have been used as legitimate weapons of war, especially during the two World Wars. Apart from the death and destruction caused, we recall the Marshall Plan, which supported Europe's reconstruction efforts to bring about a semblance of normalcy in people's lives. Out of all this sprung not just the United Nations itself, but a vast array of international jurisprudence on the responsibility of those launching wars and military attacks to fully insulate and protect innocent civilian populations and infrastructure indispensable to survival from their attacks.

However, it is a matter of concern that armed conflicts until this day seem to consider civilian populations and civilian infrastructure almost legitimate targets, resulting in the maiming and killing of thousands and rendering millions homeless. The situation has only become worse with the civilian population and indispensable civilian infrastructure becoming easy targets of terrorist groups and non-State actors, especially those sponsored by State actors. Countries with a rich history and cultural heritage, such as Syria and Afghanistan, are facing serious threats of armed conflict today, which have devastated not just the population, especially women and children, but also indispensable civilian infrastructure and historical sites. There are other countries still reeling from past military actions carried out without due consideration for protecting civilian populations and infrastructure. Therefore, the issue of the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflicts should be sought within the framework of applicable international law and in strict adherence to the principle of respect for the sovereignty of States.

India strongly condemns the use of oppressive violence against innocent civilians and the targeting of civilian objects in armed conflicts, regardless of who commits them.

In recent years, civilians and critical civilian infrastructure in urban areas have become easy targets in armed conflict situations. Access to humanitarian assistance can be easily compromised, with the destruction of hospitals, attacks on medical transport and essential services in countries experiencing armed conflict. The cyberattacks targeting civilian infrastructure, including health care, have become common, which have continued even during the pandemic.

It is a matter of serious concern that, in situations of armed conflict, well-established norms — such as respecting applicable international humanitarian law

and relevant human rights law — the protection of civilian objects and ensuring safe and unhindered access for medical and humanitarian agencies are not being adhered to by the parties. This is more evident in armed conflicts where parties are being backed by Member States as proxies. This is a dangerous trend that must be addressed. We need to reflect on such situations if we are to lend a sense of realism to the debate on the protection of civilian objects.

In armed conflict situations, United Nations peacekeepers are coming under increasing pressure to protect civilian objects. United Nations missions and peacekeepers are not a panacea for all problems in conflict situations. The tendency of burdening peacekeepers with responsibilities that ought to primarily lie with the State should stop. This disincentivizes the international community from paying greater attention to strengthening national security forces so that they can take over this responsibility from the peacekeepers. It is therefore important to provide carefully thought-out mandates to peacekeepers in close consultations with troop-contributing countries, as the protection of peacekeepers is as important as the protection of civilians. Without proper equipment, training and resources to meet the mandate's objectives and clear accountability at all levels, the expectation from peacekeeping operations to protect civilian objects is unrealistic.

The rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure and the restoration of essential services should be given high priority in the post-conflict context, as it will facilitate socioeconomic recovery and peacebuilding. Owing to the significant costs associated with it, donor countries and United Nations agencies should provide financial and technical assistance for capacity-building.

For our part, after the end of the armed conflict in 2009 in Sri Lanka, India assisted the Government of Sri Lanka in immediately restoring some of the most basic and essential civilian infrastructure. India deployed seven demining teams on an emergency basis, which enabled internally displaced persons to return to their homes and livelihoods. India contributed extensively to rebuilding basic essential infrastructure in northern Sri Lanka, including 46,000 houses for internally displaced persons. India's development portfolio of more than \$3 billion in Afghanistan is aimed at rebuilding capacities and capabilities of Afghan nationals and institutions. In addition to several infrastructure and community-development projects, India constructed the Afghan-India Friendship Dam and is now taking up construction of the Shahtoot Dam to provide safe drinking water for the 2 million residents of the city of Kabul.

In conclusion, India stands ready, as part of a broader endeavour, to support efforts aimed at strengthening the normative architecture for the protection of objects indispensable to civilians and the provision of humanitarian assistance in armed conflict. Such a normative architecture should respect the principles of sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity and unity of countries affected by armed conflicts.

Annex 14**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Kenya to the United Nations, Michael Kiboino**

Kenya's delegation thanks His Excellency Mr. Bui Thanh Son for hosting today's open debate. We also thank all the distinguished briefers for their briefings.

Kenya condemns the deliberate targeting of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations as a method of warfare. Beyond the immediate suffering it causes, it leads to long-lasting devastation of economies, livelihoods, education and social systems. These impacts persist long after the immediate conflict is over, including when ceasefires and peace agreements have been reached. It is for these reasons that we welcome today's debate.

Indeed, this debate represents an opportunity to underline the importance for all parties to conflict to protect objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations, including the infrastructure for food, agriculture, water and sanitation, medical services and energy. While this principle is well established in international humanitarian law, we believe it needs to be constantly emphasized so that it better informs the conduct of war and the responses of the international community.

The concerns of the Security Council on this matter are clear. But even as it is right to express them, we must not lose sight of dangerous actors that are entrenching themselves in multiple countries and regions. We refer to the increasing exploitation of the humanitarian space and its associated civilian objects by such terrorist groups as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. These groups understand the humanitarian concerns directed at civilians who are victims of conflict and therefore utilize the population to generate finances, disguise their operations and recruit from traumatized, uprooted refugees. They also exploit civilian objects as cover to launch attacks, hoping to attract retaliation and subsequent collateral damage for propaganda purposes.

Unfortunately, not enough is being done to deny them the space to engage in such manipulative and atrocious actions. If anything, terrorist groups increasingly feel that the humanitarian space is a strategic asset. This is prolonging conflicts and weakening the ability of peacekeeping missions and national security agencies to truly protect the peace and civilians. We look forward to more action to address this growing problem.

Allow me to underscore some practical measures that, if implemented, would lead to more effective protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in conflict situations.

First, the Security Council should insist that parties to armed conflict adhere to international humanitarian law and protect civilian infrastructure that supports essential services as well as the workers who operate and maintain it.

Secondly, the Council should embed the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population in its decision-making, including, but not limited to, applying impactful sanctions against individuals and groups that exploit the humanitarian space as a key part of their strategy and operations to further their terrorist agenda; ensuring that peacekeeping mandates are fit for purpose so as to deter and combat such exploitation; and making sure that missions have robust public messaging and counter-narrative capabilities.

It is also time to start emphasizing resilience-based humanitarian support, which comprises rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure, restoration of essential services, and provision of modern equipment and technology.

This will facilitate socioeconomic development, enhanced adaptive capacity of local populations and reduced dependency on humanitarian aid.

The international financial institutions can also do more to de-risk investments in fragile post-conflict environments, which often struggle to attract traditional investment. In addition, the Security Council should more robustly use the advisory role of the Peacebuilding Commission in post-conflict situations.

In conclusion, I would reaffirm Kenya's support for the measures that the Security Council will institute, including adopting the draft resolution contained in document S/2021/402 to deter the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations.

Annex 15**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations, Juan Ramón de la Fuente Ramírez**

[Original: Spanish]

Mexico thanks Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and Mr. Rudd for their informative briefings.

In the light of the current challenges posed by the increasing urbanization of conflicts and the use of new technologies, we also thank Viet Nam for convening today's debate. We agree in particular on the need for unrestricted respect for international humanitarian law and the importance of protecting objects that are indispensable for the survival of civilian populations, in particular drinking-water installations and supplies, power plants, medical facilities and schools, to mention a few that seem essential to us.

It is a source of alarm for Mexico that attacks on these indispensable spaces persist despite the fact that they are prohibited by the protocols additional to the Geneva Conventions. We express our strong condemnation of this type of attack and the lack of compliance with the norms of international humanitarian law. There is no room for exceptions: deliberate attacks on critical infrastructure can never be condoned. The starting point is to prevent the suffering of civilians in any conflict at all costs.

I will focus my specific comments on two points in particular.

First, with regard to strengthening the protection of civilians through respect for international humanitarian law, it is true that since the adoption of the protection-of-civilians agenda in 1999, the Security Council has promoted resolutions related to food, education and the protection of medical personnel. However, it will always be necessary to continue to expand the spectrum of protection. That is why we have enthusiastically joined in co-sponsoring the draft resolution proposed by Viet Nam (S/2021/402), which strengthens international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the area of the protection of essential objects.

The specific mention of civilians operating, repairing, and maintaining these objects represents in itself a significant contribution to the strengthening of international humanitarian law. Moreover, the inclusion of a sub-item dedicated to the protection of vital objects in the reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians will contribute to raising the visibility of this issue and, in particular, to strengthening the accountability system.

Secondly, with regard to the consequences for civilian populations of attacks on indispensable objects, beyond the attacks on drinking water facilities or power plants that disrupt the provision of basic services, the coronavirus disease pandemic has made the link between access to water and health even more obvious. Without water, it is impossible to comply with hygiene and disease-prevention measures. Damage to crops and livestock affects the availability of food, which creates conditions of food insecurity and can even lead to the use of hunger as an instrument of war. Mexico therefore considers that, in addition to respecting international humanitarian law, investing in the maintenance and resilience of infrastructure is imperative, so that services continue to function in situations of conflict and to mitigate the consequences of conflict, which can generate truly precarious humanitarian conditions.

My delegation is also concerned that women and girls are disproportionately affected by the lack of basic services, as are indigenous peoples. For example, the closure of schools owing to attacks or lack of water or electricity has long-term

repercussions on the education and development of the child population and the development of the community. Schools are also places where children receive food and psychosocial support. Such facilities must be respected without exception. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that Mexico has joined the Safe Schools Initiative. We will continue to support efforts aimed at protecting schools and all educational facilities.

In sum, we have an obligation to prevent further damage and consequences for civilian populations in situations of armed conflict. We must ensure unrestricted compliance with international humanitarian law in any pronouncement or action of the Security Council, strengthen awareness of these rules at the national level and ensure that those responsible for acts contrary to international humanitarian law do not enjoy impunity.

Annex 16**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Niger to the United Nations, Abdou Abarry**

[Original: French]

The topic under review is relevant insofar as efforts to curb the spread of the coronavirus disease have increased the vulnerabilities of civilians living in conflict zones and posed new challenges for State and humanitarian actors in protecting these populations and the infrastructure necessary for their survival.

In several theatres of conflict, be it in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan or the Sahel, there has been an upsurge in cowardly and wanton attacks by armed groups on civilian targets in violation of the principles of distinction, prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, proportionality and the taking of precautionary measures in the conduct of hostilities, as advocated by the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their protocols additional. The time has come for the Security Council to strengthen its commitment in this area, sending a clear message of support for respect for international humanitarian law and accountability for violators.

At this point, I would like to thank Viet Nam for making this important issue one of the priorities of its presidency of the Security Council this month and of its mandate as a non-permanent member. We would also like to thank Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and the representative of the International Peace Institute for their briefings and for their engagement on this important issue.

One thing is clear — the humanitarian consequences of attacks on such civilian infrastructure and objects as energy, health, education and water facilities, together with the destruction of crops and food stocks in times of conflict, are felt not only in the short, but also in the long term.

In the short term, these acts contribute to the complexity of the humanitarian situation of populations trapped between belligerents. For example, attacking a power plant, is an assault on the water-distribution system, the functioning of hospitals and the wastewater-treatment system in a community. This will lead to water-borne diseases and other disruptions in the provision of basic services and to the displacement of vulnerable populations.

In the long term, the road to rebuilding a country whose civilian infrastructure has been destroyed by conflict is long and requires enormous resources. The damage caused by war leads to a delay in economic and social development and puts the post-conflict country at risk of enormous debts.

In the light of the foregoing, the protection of civilians and the objects essential to their survival therefore requires a holistic approach from us. To this end, I would like to make a few recommendations to make the protection of critical infrastructure a central issue in the protection of civilians in times of conflict.

First of all, we should endorse the Secretary-General's recommendations on adopting national and comprehensive policy frameworks on the protection of civilians that focus on preventing, mitigating and responding to damage to the infrastructure on which civilians depend. In this regard, I would like to highlight and commend the efforts of the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel — namely, Chad, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali and my country, the Niger — for having developed and implemented national policies and other frameworks on the protection of civilians and infrastructure and for the delivery of essential services, based on a proactive approach to reduce the impact of conflict on civilian populations.

It is also important to ensure equitable and inclusive access for civil society actors in the process of setting up programmes to strengthen the resilience of civil

infrastructure and essential services and, in developing these measures, to take into account the youth, peace and security agenda, and the women and peace and security agenda, as well as the recommendations set forth in resolution 1325 (2000).

Furthermore, given that 6 of the 10 largest peacekeeping operations have been deployed in the countries most exposed to climate change, measures to improve our understanding of the correlation between conflict and climate-change impacts are essential. The Niger, together with Ireland and the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, continues to work towards the inclusion of climate change in any effort to address conflict situations.

Finally, any real hope of putting an end to these violations in conflict zones will also necessarily involve concrete action to silence the weapons and put an end to their proliferation. We would therefore like to remind States of their obligation to respect the Arms Trade Treaty and invite the Security Council to examine the role played by certain actors in the circulation of these weapons, particularly in the Sahel.

In conclusion, and as today's debate is the last high-level event on the agenda of the Vietnamese presidency, let me extend my sincere congratulations to the President of the Security Council and his Government for a successful presidency, as evidenced by the adoption of important work product by the Security Council this month.

Annex 17**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Tunisia to the United Nations, Tarek Ladeb**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I should like to thank Viet Nam for convening a meeting on this important issue. I also thank Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Kevin Rudd, Chair of the International Peace Institute.

The reality of the humanitarian crises raging in many regions worldwide, particularly in the Arab world and Africa, has revealed that the disruption or interruption of essential services necessary for survival, for years or even decades, as a result of prolonged armed conflict and occupation is a salient feature of such crises. These situations have become complex, their toll on civilians and civilian facilities growing ever greater as economic crises, climate phenomena and natural disasters have worsened.

The deterioration of such essential services as water, energy, sanitation and health care has undoubtedly exacerbated weaknesses and vulnerabilities and had a major impact on civilian infrastructure in conflict zones, threatening food security, livelihoods and health. By spurring and prolonging the waves of forced displacement, it has also undermined security and stability and prevented the peoples affected from achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The effectiveness of the system of essential services and of the broader humanitarian response in situations of armed conflict is at stake now more than ever, given the challenge posed by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The international community and the Security Council in particular must therefore work towards a more coherent, inclusive and sustainable approach that is mindful of the close interdependence of peace, security and sustainable development. In that connection, I would also like to note the following:

First, it will be necessary to go beyond the traditional focus on short-term humanitarian solutions to problems caused by the disruption of essential services in order to address the root causes of crises and find proactive and lasting solutions.

In that regard, ending conflicts must become the top priority, through an effective Security Council effort bolstered by consensus among Council members. We emphasize the urgent need to strengthen the foundations of peace by reaching political settlements and actively pursuing peaceful means of preventing armed conflict from occurring and recurring, thereby establishing and building peace.

Secondly, it is necessary to establish a firm foundation for minimizing the disruption of essential services in conflict situations by enshrining the concepts of protection and the best interests of vulnerable groups, and by ensuring that an effective response is firmly rooted in international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Addressing the challenges associated with a decline in the provision of essential services will require parties to armed conflict, first and foremost, to commit to respecting the rules of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, especially the rules of prudence and proportionality. Belligerents must refrain from attacking civilians, infrastructure and persons involved in the provision of basic services while facilitating impartial access to those services and ensuring accountability in order to prevent such violations from recurring.

Rehabilitating basic services is most effective when done at the appropriate time and place, particularly when a humanitarian truce has been approved and a ceasefire has been established. We take this opportunity to reiterate that it is necessary to establish a global ceasefire in response to the Secretary-General's appeal and resolution 2532 (2020) in order to end attacks on and maintain essential facilities. Doing so will contribute to meeting humanitarian and medical needs more effectively, promote efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and facilitate the voluntary and dignified return of displaced persons to their homes.

Thirdly, it is vital to adopt an approach that transcends the frameworks for and shortcomings of the ongoing, conventional, short-term management of problems related to essential services to include reducing vulnerability, preserving dignity and changing people's lives.

Such an approach will require action to contain the deterioration of infrastructure during conflicts before it becomes irreversible. To that end, more should be done to interlink the humanitarian and development plans of specialized United Nations agencies, early recovery efforts should be harmonized, and integrated projects that encompass humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities should be promoted.

In that regard, it would be worthwhile to continue building the capacities of affected communities and institutions so as to ensure long-term recovery and resilience in crises, particularly by rehabilitating hospitals, schools, roads, water and energy supplies and sanitation, while also making decent and sustainable livelihoods available to affected groups, thereby improving their prospects for a better life.

Lastly, my delegation is pleased to co-sponsor the humanitarian draft resolution proposed by Viet Nam on the subject of today's meeting, as contained in document S/2021/402. The aim of the draft resolution is to prioritize the protection of civilians and civilian facilities during armed conflict, thus enshrining the rules of international law, including international humanitarian law, international human rights law and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Annex 18

Statement by the Acting Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, James Roscoe

Our thanks to Mr. Lowcock, Mr. Maurer and Mr. Rudd for their briefings. The United Kingdom is grateful to Viet Nam for convening this debate and is delighted to co-sponsor Viet Nam's resolution on the protection of indispensable objects for human survival (resolution 2573 (2020)).

It was striking listening to the briefers today. They catalogued examples — specific examples — of despicable violations of international humanitarian law. And in the Security Council we often hear of this kind of evidence — evidence of the devastation that such attacks on indispensable infrastructure have on civilian populations. We hear those stories in isolation, and the power of hearing them in aggregate is significant. Each one of them represents a failure of the Council to fulfil its mandate. They are our failures because we are not taking the action that might prevent them.

Just as our briefers set out the examples and impacts of violations, they also set out how they can be prevented: enhanced compliance with international humanitarian law, proper military practice and, critically, accountability for those who make a tactic of such attacks. The adoption of this resolution today should signal the Council's unity in condemning such attacks. But it will start to address this issue only if we are serious about taking action together.

Our first step must be to ensure all parties to armed conflicts understand their legal obligations under international humanitarian law, follow the rules and exercise restraint. That is why the United Kingdom provides specialist training in this respect through our partnership programmes with the armed forces of other Member States. Our training covers international humanitarian law, international agreements and the military justice system. Our aim is to build knowledge and compliance and support more accountable defence and security forces.

But when perpetrators attack indispensable objects in full knowledge of their obligations under international law and choose to ignore them, we — the Council — should act. Instead, all too often, they are able to do so with impunity. Effective national and international accountability mechanisms are a crucial element in providing justice for victims and in preventing such attacks in the future through deterrence. It is worth underlining that, under the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional, States have the obligation to respect, and to ensure respect for, those instruments.

So what should we be doing? There are three immediate actions we can take to protect indispensable objects and prevent the suffering caused by targeting them in violation of international humanitarian law, using existing mechanisms.

First, we must improve reporting and evidence. Governments and armed actors should ensure the timely collection and reporting of information to avoid harm to civilians and civilian objects, including indispensable objects. We should also ensure the effective use of existing United Nations reporting mechanisms in the Security Council and the Secretariat to inform decision-making.

Secondly, the Security Council must act on reporting. Despite the provisions in resolution 2417 (2018), the Council has failed to encourage any independent State investigations into the use of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare. We have the means, but no action has taken place. In our statement to the Council at the 11 March open debate on conflict and food insecurity (see S/2021/250), we highlighted such concerns in Tigray, north-east Nigeria, Yemen and South Sudan.

Thirdly, we should do more to hold those responsible for the targeting of indispensable objects in violation of international humanitarian law to account. We will continue to press for full, prompt and impartial investigations into all incidents where indispensable objections to the civilian population are attacked and to ensure that those responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law are held to account. The Security Council should also be ready to consider sanctions against those who attack civilian objects or otherwise violate international humanitarian law, as it has done previously, including in the context of South Sudan.

I would like to underscore the United Kingdom's own unwavering commitment to the proper implementation of, and compliance with, international humanitarian law. In March 2019, we published our first *Voluntary Report on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law at Domestic Level*. We are now working with the British Red Cross to support other Member States to produce their own reports on domestic implementation as a practical measure to encourage continued improvements in compliance with international humanitarian law. The Al-Atarib Surgical Hospital in north-western Syria was bombed just over a month ago — yet another stark reminder of the devastating toll of attacks on indispensable infrastructure on civilian populations. The attackers struck because they believe that they act with impunity. No State should tell the Council that it believes in international humanitarian law or wishes to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population unless it is willing to take steps to prevent such attacks and hold those who commit them to account.

Annex 19**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Adela Raz**

I first want to thank His Excellency Mr. Bui Thanh Son, Foreign Minister of Viet Nam, for presiding over this meeting and, at the same time, his delegation for organizing this discussion. I also want to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Mr. Peter Maurer, and the Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute, Mr. Kevin Rudd, for their insightful briefings.

Discussions on the protection of civilians require a nuanced focus on the situation of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations. Whether it be energy systems, medical facilities, sources of food and water or waste management infrastructure, the disruption of such services can exacerbate humanitarian emergencies and be catastrophic to essential infrastructure, including hospitals.

The pandemic has stressed the importance of ensuring that parties to armed conflict comply with international humanitarian law and human rights law and that critical infrastructure, particularly for the delivery of humanitarian and health services, is protected. The need for a humanitarian pause to address the effects of the pandemic and ensure an effective roll out of the vaccine is urgent and emphasizes the importance of today's meeting. Afghanistan therefore reiterates the Secretary-General's call for a global humanitarian ceasefire.

As a country in conflict, we understand that failing to protect indispensable objects can be disastrous. Yet our enemies continue to launch attacks, going as far as using public infrastructure. They even use their very own Afghan brothers and sisters as human shields. In response to that heinous strategy, our armed forces have been closely adhering to our national policy on civilian casualty prevention and mitigation, which delineates strict rules of engagement focused on protecting civilians and indispensable objects.

As the pandemic has waged on, we have also seen new strategies of indiscriminate and targeted attacks on journalists, human rights advocates and humanitarian workers, as well as the infrastructure on which they depend. We have seen attacks on cell towers, energy stations, transportation infrastructure and, most important, our humanitarian infrastructure. It is a cowardly campaign, which has claimed more than 1,000 casualties since the start of the year — a year that Afghans began with a hope for peace and a better future.

The deteriorating security situation, the pandemic and climate change have contributed to a nearly 100 per cent increase in the number of Afghans in need, reaching 18.4 million people in January. In addition, the number of people suffering from food insecurity has risen to 14 million, and the number of people fleeing conflict in 2020 exceeded 80,000. That situation is both dangerous and unsustainable, but it could be mitigated through enhanced, genuine, firm and committed efforts for peace by the Taliban.

Since the early days of the pandemic, the Government of Afghanistan has been firm in its message that a humanitarian ceasefire is needed to ensure the protection of civilians and indispensable objects. That is a message that was shared by members of the Security Council on countless occasions and that was amplified by the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire. Nevertheless, those calls have failed to materialize, leading to another year of pain for the innocent people of Afghanistan.

The lack of a ceasefire will directly impact our vaccine efforts as coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines begin to arrive in Afghanistan through the work of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility and generous bilateral donations. Defeating the pandemic requires a focused approach, which cannot be achieved if attacks continue to target infrastructure that is key to a successful vaccine roll out.

In that regard, we thank the Security Council for adopting resolution 2565 (2021), on facilitating equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict and post-conflict situations and in humanitarian emergencies. We hope that the Taliban will understand the urgency of the situation, cease hostilities and targeted attacks on indispensable infrastructure and personnel and truly work in favour of the safety of our people.

In addition to the calls and resolutions that the Security Council has already issued, we believe that it also has a vital role to play in helping us to enhance the protection of civilians and indispensable objects in Afghanistan. The effective implementation of sanctions remains a tool that can be used to encourage the Taliban into compliance with international humanitarian law. By not heeding the calls for a humanitarian ceasefire during a pandemic and intensifying attacks on indispensable infrastructure and personnel, the Taliban makes us question its genuine commitment to peace. The Council must not lose sight of that when deciding on future sanctions listings or delistings. Our efforts must remain steadfast and focused.

Furthermore, with the Turkey conference on the horizon, we believe that there is a window of hope for achieving peace, which requires a strong role for the United Nations, supported by regional and international partners, in order to seize the momentum and consolidate all efforts to end the conflict in Afghanistan. Only a comprehensive and enduring peace can ensure stability in Afghanistan and, with it, maximize our efforts to ensure the protection of civilians and indispensable objects.

Finally, let me reiterate our commitment to protecting and safeguarding all Afghan citizens throughout the ongoing conflict and fight against terrorist and armed groups, and, in doing so, pay tribute to our essential personnel and armed forces. Those heroes have continued to work tirelessly during the pandemic, fighting to protect the lives of their fellow Afghans, even when that means risking their own lives. We will honour their sacrifice by continuing our firm and tireless efforts for peace. Peace is the mandate that was given to us by our people. We will continue to honour it.

Annex 20**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Armenia to the United Nations, Mher Margaryan**

I would like to thank the presidency of Viet Nam for organizing this open debate on the topic of “Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Peter Maurer and Chair of the International Peace Institute Kevin Rudd for highlighting the challenges with regard to the protection of critical civilian infrastructure in situations of armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies.

Armed conflicts accompanied by the massive use of heavy weaponry and indiscriminate attacks on residential areas can have a devastating impact on the civilian infrastructure, critical for the survival of the civilian population. In the time of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, large-scale military hostilities and the targeting of health-care institutions, electricity networks and water pipelines undermine the ability of the authorities to respond to the spread of the disease in conflict-affected areas.

International humanitarian law and international human rights law shape a crucial framework for the effective protection of the civilian population and infrastructure. Armenia attaches the utmost importance to full compliance by all parties to conflicts with their obligations under the Geneva Conventions and their protocols additional without any political preconditions. Any attempts to politicize humanitarian assistance to the population in need should be identified and addressed by the international community.

While in many parts of the world the Secretary-General’s call for a global ceasefire has been instrumental to reducing tensions, in our region the pre-planned large-scale war launched by Azerbaijan in September 2020, with the direct support of Turkey and the involvement of foreign terrorist fighters, has been the biggest military escalation in the time of the pandemic. From the first day of the hostilities, the Azerbaijani armed forces launched deliberate and indiscriminate attacks on civilian objects, residential buildings and infrastructure in 170 communities of Artsakh, including the capital city, Stepanakert, as well as in Martakert, Shushi, Martuni and Hadrut, causing injuries, the loss of lives and the displacement of thousands of people and inflicting a major humanitarian crisis.

Throughout its offensive, Azerbaijan widely used all types of heavy weaponry, including multiple-launch rocket systems, artillery, missiles, various types of unmanned aerial vehicles and military aircraft and prohibited weapons, such as cluster munitions and incendiary weapons, to conduct targeted attacks on the civilian population and infrastructure in gross violation of international humanitarian law. Deliberate air bombardments, artillery and missile strikes heavily damaged a number of medical facilities, including the maternity ward of Stepanakert’s Maternal and Child Health Centre and the hospital in Martakert. Targeted attacks were also carried out on educational institutions, which led to the destruction of 18 schools and 6 kindergartens in Artsakh, depriving 28,000 children of their right to education. The violations of humanitarian law by Azerbaijan have been widely documented by various international humanitarian and human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch.

In blatant disregard of the calls of the international community, including the co-Chairs of the Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Secretary-General, to immediately cease hostilities and in violation of three consecutive agreements on a humanitarian ceasefire, Azerbaijan

continued massive attacks on the civilians and civilian infrastructure of Nagorno-Karabakh, with the aim of making life in Nagorno-Karabakh impossible, as a clear demonstration of the genocidal intent of its aggression.

Genocidal intent was also manifested in the deliberate destruction of Armenian churches, shrines and cultural monuments by the armed forces of Azerbaijan. A notable example of such a policy is the targeted destruction of Armenian cathedrals, including the Holy Saviour Ghazanchetsots Cathedral and the Armenian Church of Saint John the Baptist in Shushi, which continued even after the establishment of a ceasefire.

The humanitarian crisis caused by the armed aggression of Azerbaijan was further exacerbated by the spread of COVID-19 in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan's deliberate and targeted attacks, inflicting heavy damage on health-care institutions and water and gas pipelines, severely limited the capacities of the authorities of Artsakh to contain and respond to the pandemic.

In the aftermath of the aggression, the hundreds of cluster bomblets, sub-munitions and other explosive remnants of war spread across civilian settlements and agricultural lands continue to cause a serious security risk to the lives of civilians, with a long-lasting adverse effect on the humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan's use of incendiary munitions, such as white phosphorus, which inflicted massive forest fires in Nagorno-Karabakh, causing severe physical and psychological injuries and major environmental damage, necessitates an appropriate response to ensure redress and accountability measures.

Armenia appreciates the activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the humanitarian response centre of the peacekeeping forces of the Russian Federation, which have been critical to addressing the immediate life-saving needs of the conflict-affected population. It remains a crucial priority to ensure the adequate rehabilitation of the damaged infrastructure, such as medical facilities, water systems, power networks and communication lines, and to address the issue of extensive contamination by explosive remnants of war so as to deliver a comprehensive and long-term humanitarian response.

Azerbaijan's attempts to weaponize the issue of safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations agencies to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict zone are not compatible with the fundamental humanitarian principles and are explicitly aimed at undermining international efforts to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the humanitarian, protection and early recovery needs and human rights situation of the affected population.

We reaffirm the imperative of acting in full compliance with the obligations under international humanitarian law and ensuring safe and unimpeded humanitarian access for the United Nations to Nagorno-Karabakh, in line with the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Annex 21

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations

Austria thanks Viet Nam for the timely convening of the open video-teleconference on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population under the agenda item “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”, and fully aligns itself with the statements submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 32) and the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict (annex 47). In addition, we would like to highlight a few of our national priorities.

First, we repeat our call for full compliance with international humanitarian law providing, inter alia, for the special protection of civilian objects, including objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. The strict and consistent implementation of the principles of international humanitarian law by all parties to both international and non-international conflicts is of the utmost importance. Austria continues to be a strong supporter of intergovernmental discussions, as well as multilateral efforts, on strengthening compliance with international humanitarian law.

In that regard, it bears mentioning that any object that does not contribute to military action is qualified by international humanitarian law to be a civilian object and granted specific protection accordingly. When in doubt, an object should be qualified as civilian. That is especially important in populated areas, where civilians are disproportionately represented and also disproportionately affected by attacks, which often contravene international humanitarian law. The use of explosive weapons in such areas poses a particular challenge, with almost 9 in 10 casualties resulting from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas being civilians. Moreover, in addition to the immediate effects of explosive weapons on objects indispensable to the survival of civilians, such as medical facilities, water and sanitation infrastructure and electricity grids, the damage done is compounded by indirect or reverberating effects. It is for that reason that we are strongly committed to the early adoption of a strong political declaration to effectively enhance the protection of civilians in the context of explosive weapons use in populated areas.

Secondly, the coronavirus disease pandemic has been adding to the already numerous challenges of civilians in armed conflicts, in particular of women and children, worsening their livelihood and further increasing the high demand for humanitarian needs such as food, shelter, access to safe water and sanitation facilities and medical services. Austria therefore welcomes the Secretary General’s initiative of a High-Level Task Force on Preventing Famine as an important step forward.

Thirdly, the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and enabling effective assistance by humanitarian actors are closely interrelated. It is therefore of paramount importance to guarantee safe, full, unhindered and sustained humanitarian access as provided for under international humanitarian law in order to reach all people in need, in particular the most vulnerable. The international community needs to take a more outspoken stance in condemning access restrictions and finding political and practical solutions to remove access constraints. Concerned by the numerous incidences of direct and indiscriminate attacks on humanitarian and medical personnel, we also need to further increase our efforts to ensure their safety and security.

Finally, we believe that accountability and the fight against impunity for violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law are essential steps towards reconciliation and sustainable peace. In this regard, we wish to highlight the unique and invaluable role of the International Criminal Court

(ICC). We would like to express our continued unwavering support for the Court and strongly encourage all States parties to the Rome Statute to swiftly ratify the Rome Statute amendment of December 2019, which allows the ICC to investigate and prosecute the war crime of intentional starvation of civilians, including in non-international armed conflicts.

Annex 22

Statement by the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations, Yashar Aliyev

At the outset, I would like to thank the delegation of Viet Nam for having convened this important meeting to highlight experiences, challenges and recommendations regarding the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in armed conflict.

The protection of civilians from direct and indiscriminate attacks is one of the cardinal objectives of the international humanitarian legal regime, and there are numerous prohibitions on acts that undermine this objective. The principle of distinction is at the heart of this regime. Civilian objects are subject to many of the same protections as apply to civilians themselves.

Azerbaijan is among those countries that have seriously suffered from the devastating effects of conflict. As is known, in early 1990s, Armenia unleashed a full-scale war against Azerbaijan. As a result, a significant part of the territory of Azerbaijan was seized and remained under occupation for almost 30 years.

Over the course of the conflict, Armenia has engaged in numerous violations of the prohibitions on attacks directed at, or causing indiscriminate or disproportionate harm to, civilians and civilian objects. The war claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people; all captured areas were ethnically cleansed of more than 700,000 Azerbaijanis; and most of the occupied cities, towns and villages were razed to the ground. Furthermore, the large-scale destruction of, and irreversible damage on, the natural environment by Armenia has been characterized by the international community as a form of environmental aggression.

From 2015, there has been a re-escalation in and around the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. In April 2016 and July 2020, Armenia provoked large-scale hostilities along the front line and the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported in May 2016 on the damage caused to civilian property by artillery bombardments and unexploded ordnance in Azerbaijani villages close to the conflict zone. In July 2020, cross-border attacks by the armed forces of Armenia posed a threat to the strategic international oil and gas pipelines and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway on the territory of Azerbaijan.

Another act of aggression by Armenia at the end of September 2020 and the subsequent combat actions have caused numerous casualties among Azerbaijani civilians. Extensive damage was inflicted upon the civilian infrastructure in several major cities of Azerbaijan outside the conflict zone. The armed forces of Armenia also targeted the energy infrastructure in Azerbaijan. The ballistic missile fired on the city of Minghachevir fell in close vicinity to the building of the Azerbaijan thermal power plant, which is located in the Mingachevir hydropower complex, the largest water reservoir in the South Caucasus.

As a result of the counteroffensive operation undertaken and successfully accomplished by the armed forces of Azerbaijan, some 10,000 square kilometres of the territory of Azerbaijan — with more than 300 cities, towns and village — were liberated from occupation. The scale of destruction, vandalism, plunder and looting evidenced in those territories after their liberation is shocking and unprecedented. Most parts of these areas have literally been turned into a ghost land, as all the civilian infrastructure was plundered and destroyed. Moreover, the retreating Armenian forces and Armenian illegal settlers vacating these territories were disassembling and then burning houses, schools and other civilian infrastructure, severing electric

cables and poles, destroying gas stations, chopping down trees and setting forests on fire in an attempt to leave nothing behind.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure and the vast minefields in the liberated areas represent major challenges to the safe return of internally displaced persons to their homes and properties. The Government of Azerbaijan has prioritized the rehabilitation and reconstruction of these territories and the restoration of housing, essential services and transportation and communication facilities there to ensure speedy socioeconomic recovery and post-conflict peacebuilding. In the meantime, master plans of all cities are being prepared and a number of projects are being implemented, with the participation of international partners.

At the same time, accountability for serious violations of international law must be an inevitable consequence of the offences committed. The fight against impunity is also an important preventive tool and an essential prerequisite on the path to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation.

Annex 23**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Bahrain to the United Nations, Jamal Alrowaiei**

[Original: Arabic]

At the outset, I should like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Bui Thanh Son, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, who will be presiding over this meeting. I thank the Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, President of the Security Council for April, for convening this important meeting at a time when armed conflicts in urban areas are on the rise, posing a threat not only to the lives of civilians, but also to civilian facilities providing the essential services that make decent living conditions possible.

I must thank the briefers, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross; and Kevin Rudd, Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute.

Although the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977 provide legal frameworks for the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflict, civilian objects and civilians remain the primary targets of armed conflicts, especially as armed conflicts in urban areas become more common, claiming innocent lives and destroying civilian objects and agricultural land. According to the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), direct or indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflict damaged and destroyed homes, schools, hospitals, markets, places of worship and essential civilian infrastructure. In addition, as conflicts continue to take their toll on hospitals and essential infrastructure, the outbreak of the coronavirus disease pandemic is weakening the capacity of conflict-affected countries to provide the health-care services needed to contain the pandemic. Moreover, insecurity, instability and inadequate protection of humanitarian and health-care workers disrupt the provision of the humanitarian assistance required to alleviate civilian suffering. Bearing that in mind, Bahrain endorsed the Secretary-General's sincere appeal for an immediate global ceasefire.

Houthi militias backed by Iran continue to launch explosive-laden drones and ballistic missiles towards Saudi Arabia, targeting civilian objects and innocent civilians, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. Bahrain affirms its solidarity with Saudi Arabia in every action taken by that country to deter the terrorist militias and preserve its security, stability and territorial integrity. We also endorse the Saudi Arabian position that the international community must work together to stop these blatant attacks.

In conclusion, the protection of civilians, particularly vulnerable groups, and civilian objects, including essential civilian facilities, in armed conflicts must remain a priority for the international community. We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, which is more urgent than ever.

Annex 24**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Belgium to the United Nations**

[Original: French]

Belgium associates itself with the written statements submitted on behalf of the European Union and its member States (annex 32) and of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians (annex 47).

The reports of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians over recent years call us to action on the increasing lack of respect for international humanitarian law, the absence of protection and the tragic consequences of these shortcomings in the majority of the countries on the agenda of the Security Council. The injured and the sick, as well as medical personnel, are being deliberately attacked. Impartial humanitarian actors continue to be harmed and to face persistent widespread access constraints, and millions of civilians are being forced to leave their homes for a perilous future where they will face heightened protection and assistance needs. The reports detail the worrisome trends of indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian objects, including medical facilities and schools, as well as objects and facilities indispensable to the survival of the population, which seem to be occurring with appalling frequency.

Against this backdrop, Belgium would like to draw the attention of the Council to the following points.

First of all, let me address the fate of children. These attacks cause immense human suffering, with long-term effects often felt for several generations, and thus jeopardize the prospects for lasting peace. Neglecting generations of children in situations of armed conflict dooms their societies to failure, even long after the conflict has ended.

Over the past year, we have seen cyberattacks targeting medical facilities and organizations and others on the front lines of the response to the coronavirus disease pandemic. These actions put human lives at risk by impacting or reducing the ability of critical institutions to function, distribute supplies or provide essential services. Belgium therefore supports the call by the International Committee of the Red Cross on Governments to take immediate and decisive steps to end all cyberattacks against civilian and medical infrastructure and facilities. In this regard, Governments must work together, including at the United Nations, to reaffirm and recommit to the international rules prohibiting such actions, in particular international humanitarian law.

Indeed, international humanitarian law is the most important tool for such purposes. Respect for international humanitarian law is not a matter of legal technicality but, above all, a matter of human decency and political will — the political will to conduct hostilities in a manner that respects international humanitarian law; to enshrine these rules in training for combat personnel and in military practices; to put in place appropriate legislative and institutional mechanisms to address violations of international humanitarian law; and to hold those responsible for war crimes to account.

How, then, can we strengthen implementation of international humanitarian law? Belgium would like to share some good practices today.

First, we must promote the implementation and dissemination of international humanitarian law at the national level. In this regard, national humanitarian law commissions and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies play a crucial role.

Moreover, it is impossible to further disseminate international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians without engagement with non-State armed groups, since it is only through dialogue that we can share information, encourage respect for the rules and negotiate humanitarian access. Care must therefore be taken to ensure that counter-terrorism measures do not hinder this commitment, and hence pose no obstacles to humanitarian action based on humanitarian principles.

It is also important to provide adequate relevant training for armed forces. In Belgium, international humanitarian law is an integral part of the training provided to military personnel. We are also investing in training on the protection of civilians for troop-contributing countries, particularly in French.

Secondly, States that support parties to an armed conflict, whether through a coalition of States or by supporting a non-State armed group, must respect and ensure respect for international humanitarian law — that is, seek to exert any influence they may have over the conduct of the parties to ensure they abide by international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, it is incumbent upon States, pursuant to their obligations under international humanitarian law, to equip themselves with the means to ensure those who commit violations are held accountable for their actions, as well as to deter the commission of further atrocities. Belgium has therefore established universal jurisdiction, to take effect as soon as conditions allow. We recall, in this regard, the contribution of the International Criminal Court in the fight against impunity for the most serious crimes, including war crimes. We also recall that depriving civilians of objects essential to their survival, including deliberately obstructing the delivery of aid or services in order to intentionally starve them, is a war crime and may as such be brought before the International Criminal Court.

In conclusion, the international community must be more consistent in its condemnation of such flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. The Security Council undoubtedly has a core role to play in this regard. It could encourage the provision of international humanitarian law training to peacekeepers; give appropriate emphasis to international humanitarian law in efforts to rebuild the rule of law in post-conflict situations; promote accountability and add perpetrators of the most serious crimes to sanctions lists; or make better use of existing monitoring and investigation mechanisms.

Annex 25

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Brazil to the United Nations

Brazil congratulates Viet Nam for the initiative of promoting this timely debate on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. This question is at the core of the protection of civilians, who generally suffer the dire consequences of increasingly long and complex armed conflicts. As the concept note (S/2021/335, annex) rightly highlights, more civilians are dying from the indirect effects of armed conflicts than from hostilities and attacks.

International humanitarian law provides a solid framework to protect civilian objects, also granting special protection to those that are indispensable to the survival of the population. It goes beyond the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Protocols Additional I and II to the Geneva Conventions set out a clear prohibition against deliberately denying the civilian population such objects and detailed norms in this regard. Modern international humanitarian law therefore reflects a conscious choice to strengthen protection and limit the means and methods of warfare so as to minimize human suffering.

Yet, despite the normative developments regulating armed conflict, more often than not the Security Council receives reports of the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. The clear prohibition of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare has not impeded this appalling practice in ongoing conflicts. The dire consequences of these violations may be felt for generations, not only because of high recovery costs but also due to the loss of lives and livelihoods.

It is clear that the problem is not the absence of norms, but the lack of implementation and respect for them. Hence the Security Council should call for respect for, and adherence to, international humanitarian law in a consistent manner. If there are violations, they must be met by independent and non-selective accountability, including through relevant international criminal law instruments. Member States, for their part, need to increase their efforts in disseminating international humanitarian law norms and principles internally, including in peacetime.

It is also important to address the root causes of armed conflict. After all, the protection of civilians and the objects indispensable to their survival can best be achieved if we prevent conflicts from happening in the first place. Placing emphasis on diplomacy and cooperation reduces the risks of armed conflict and the human costs associated with it. The international community should demonstrate renewed commitment to making use of the tools established by the Charter of the United Nations for the prevention of conflicts and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Peacekeeping operations may also assist Member States in building the necessary capacity to perform their primary responsibility to protect their citizens. Quick-impact projects, for instance, may provide immediate relief to the civilian population and improve the conditions for more effective implementation of protection of civilian mandates. A comprehensive approach to the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population also calls for long-term solutions that enhance resilience, reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and help States move along the path of political reconciliation and development. This dimension also serves to highlight the importance of mainstreaming peacebuilding efforts in the United Nations, and the benefits of greater interaction between the Council and the Peacebuilding Commission.

In conclusion, any armed conflict will inevitably cause destruction, jeopardize civilian infrastructure and disrupt essential services. While respecting and ensuring

respect for international humanitarian law is instrumental to minimizing human suffering, the most effective way to protect civilians is to prevent conflicts and, if they emerge, to tirelessly promote political solutions for lasting peace.

Annex 26**Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations, Maritza Chan Valverde**

At the outset, Costa Rica would like to thank Viet Nam for convening this high-level open debate on “Critical infrastructure: the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”. Costa Rica is pleased to see you, Minister Bui Thanh Sơn, presiding over this important meeting. We greatly appreciate the briefings provided by Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock; International Committee of the Red Cross President Peter Maurer; and Kevin Rudd, Chair of the International Peace Institute Board of Directors.

Costa Rica deeply regrets that both State and non-State parties to conflict have failed to distinguish between military objectives and civilians and civilian objects, or to take every feasible precaution in the conduct of hostilities. Much of the harm civilians experience in conflict is indiscriminate and permanent, but also preventable. In this regard, Costa Rica would like to stress two points.

First of all, despite existing international legal protections, civilians and civilian objects continue to sustain extensive harm — local businesses and marketplaces are destroyed, schools demolished and public health infrastructure incapacitated. This impacts sources of income for people and their communities and undermines feelings of security and dignity. Daily life is upended, and the international community is not upholding its obligations to protect civilians in conflict if we continue to permit the destruction of civilian infrastructure and services by ignoring the direct, indirect and reverberating effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Costa Rica therefore calls on Member States to join in support of a strong draft political declaration on strengthening the protection of civilians from humanitarian harm arising from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Secondly, conflict-related environmental damage can have devastating impacts on civilian lives and livelihoods, including detrimental effects on human health and suffering, as the Secretary-General outlined in his 2019 and 2020 reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2019/373 and S/2020/366). Indispensable to survival, protecting the environment in armed conflict is protecting civilians.

The destruction of the environment, including through exposure to conflict pollution or toxic remnants of war, can make life unsustainable for civilians and impact the delivery of essential services to civilian populations. For example, conflict-related contamination of water resources and the destruction of water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure can eliminate access to drinking water and waste disposal, of particular concern for halting the spread of communicable diseases, including cholera and the coronavirus disease. The deliberate shutting down of water-pumping facilities continues to have devastating effects on the lives of millions of people in conflict-affected areas in the Middle East and eastern Ukraine, while also having detrimental consequences on agricultural production. Meanwhile, damage to water-pumping stations and related energy infrastructure in Ukraine risks flooding mines that store nuclear and toxic waste, threatening a potential regional environmental catastrophe.

Civilians living in conflict zones are further exposed to increased vulnerability to climate risks, as violence breaks down environmental governance and mitigation infrastructure essential to combating these impacts, as well as the climate crisis and its effects. Costa Rica calls on the Secretary-General and the Security Council to take measures to ensure regular monitoring and assessment of these risks in armed conflicts in order to improve the understanding of the impacts of conflict-related environmental degradation on indispensable civilian objects and find solutions to

improve prevention, mitigation and remediation as a means of better protecting civilians in armed conflict.

Protecting civilians in conflict is an increasingly complex task, and the question of how to protect is ever-more pertinent. Providing effective protection starts with understanding what threats to human security exist and how these differ within a population. However, even with the best of intentions, civilian harm still occurs and needs to be addressed to maintain credibility. The coronavirus disease pandemic has further constrained the international community's ability to maintain focus on its protection responsibilities in the face of an acute crisis at home. It is clear that more can and should be done to support civilians and the internally displaced. Nevertheless, the cross-cutting nature of the protection of civilians also gives the issue particular importance within the often-siloed landscape of the United Nations system and its varied stakeholders.

Annex 27**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta**

Humankind is facing a complex scenario and colossal challenges. International peace and security are threatened by the increase in conflicts and unconventional warfare, while the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has triggered a crisis with manifold and devastating effects that transcend the area of health and affect the economy, trade and our societies in general.

The root causes of conflict must be eradicated, and a just, democratic and equitable international order must be established. The substantial resources allocated to the arms industry should be invested in sustainable development and provide the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the necessary means for its implementation. The Charter of the United Nations must be strictly complied with, in particular its purposes and principles of non-interference in the internal affairs of States and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

We share the concern reflected in the Secretary-General's latest reports on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, which note that civilians continue to make up the vast majority of victims in conflict situations, targets of indiscriminate attacks and other violations.

The challenges we face in ensuring the protection of civilians, particularly in conflict situations, are manifold, including arms transfers to unauthorized non-State actors, an increase in development programmes associated with lethal autonomous weapons systems, the use of military attack drones, increasing military expenditures and the malicious use of information and telecommunications technologies. The resources earmarked for the development of these technologies should contribute to the economic and social development of peoples.

The Security Council should fulfil its primary mandate of maintaining international peace and security, promoting respect for international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes. It should refrain from supporting military adventures and from resorting to the threat or use of force in the settlement of conflicts.

The responsibility for conflict prevention and the protection of civilians lies with States. The international community, the United Nations and regional and subregional bodies can provide constructive assistance, but not replace the role of the affected State. They should support and complement the efforts of national Governments, impartially and unconditionally, when requested to do so, in strict respect for their sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence.

It is unacceptable that civilian protection efforts are manipulated to advance the geopolitical interests of certain States and used as an excuse for disregarding and violating the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and interfering in their internal affairs.

We strongly condemn the killing of innocent people as well as the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force against them. The protection of civilians cannot be a pretext for legitimizing military interventions aimed at imposing regime change and overthrowing the political, economic and social order legitimately established in sovereign States.

We recognize that humanitarian assistance constitutes a fundamental component of the protection of civilians in armed conflict, and it must be provided in accordance with the principles of the Charter, international law, international humanitarian law and General Assembly resolution 46/182. The guiding principles of

humanitarian assistance must be respected, namely, humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and provided in accordance with international law and the national laws of the affected countries and with the consent of the receiving States.

We reject the manipulation of humanitarian assistance for political purposes. The application and intensification of unilateral coercive measures, in violation of international law, cause serious deprivation and human harm to the very civilians who are intended to be protected. These arbitrary and illegal measures generate additional difficulties in the current context of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We reiterate the full validity of the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, signed by the Heads of State and Government of the entire region.

All parties involved in hostilities must comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional.

This also applies to United Nations peacekeeping operations, particularly those with civilian protection mandates and deployed in changing security contexts. These must have realistic, achievable mandates with specific, clearly defined objectives and the necessary resources to avoid jeopardizing the safety and security of peacekeepers.

Protecting civilians, particularly in situations of armed conflict, requires political will and commitment. We reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's urgent call to cease hostilities and put an end to the scourge of war, and instead to open up opportunities for diplomacy and cooperation, enabling us to confront together the terrible COVID-19 pandemic.

It is the duty of all States, and in particular of the members of the Security Council, to uphold multilateralism and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, including respect for the sovereign equality of States and their political independence, unity and territorial integrity; the peaceful settlement of disputes; and refraining from the use or threat of use of force in international relations.

Annex 28**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Ecuador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

I would like to express my delegation's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, a key issue in the United Nations efforts to promote and ensure the life and dignity of populations in conflict zones, as well as full respect for their rights. Together with peace, that is the central issue that justifies the existence of the Security Council and the United Nations. Its inclusion in the formal agenda of the Council, 32 years ago, has made it possible for progress to be made in this area, although major challenges remain.

In 2019 we celebrated the seventieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, but despite having a robust normative framework, little has been achieved as an international community in recent years since that commemoration. In 2021 we face the particular challenge of recovering ground lost as a result of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, from which we are gradually emerging but which dismantled the efforts and projections of the first year of the Decade of Action, which was 2020, for a world of peace by 2030.

In the current circumstances of the global health crisis, all Members of this Organization and all its organs, including in particular the Security Council, must rise to meet that existential challenge. To that end, it is essential to ensure the implementation of a global ceasefire.

Therefore, the implementation of resolutions 2532 (2021) and 2565 (2021) is key to facilitating access and corridors for humanitarian aid, as well as all the resolutions aimed at protecting the population. But it is also essential to expand the Security Council's provisions on the protection of essential objects for the civilian population.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2020/525) indicates an absolutely precarious and persistent situation and enormous gaps, which have expanded with COVID-19. Civilian assets have continued to be destroyed or damaged over the past three years, and it is time for a strong response from the Security Council. I note in this regard the briefings this morning by the representative of Viet Nam and by Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and Head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. I would also like to draw attention to the briefing by the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Peter Maurer, and by the Chair of the Board of Directors of the International Peace Institute, Kevin Rudd.

The destruction of access means additional barriers for people with disabilities. I therefore underscore resolution 2475 (2019), which recognizes the discriminatory impact of armed conflict on such persons.

It is also regrettable that women, children, internally displaced persons and refugees continue to be among those most affected by attacks on vital civilian objects. It is essential that the Security Council consider the distinct impact that women suffer as a result of violence and conflict and promote and ensure the participation of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, including in efforts to protect civilians.

Ecuador rejects and condemns the continued attacks on health services, including the destruction of hospitals, as well as the military use of, or attacks on,

schools. We also condemn and reject the use of cyberspace to destroy or damage critical infrastructure, including in the area of health.

Ecuador will continue to promote the Organization's efforts against the use of explosives in populated areas. And on this occasion we insist on condemning the use of those weapons, as well as on our commitment to continuing to support the efforts of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society in promoting the effective implementation of international humanitarian law and alleviating the impact and suffering caused by conflicts.

We advocate the peaceful settlement of disputes and reject the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects, prohibited by international humanitarian law. We also promote universal disarmament. For that reason, we also reject the use of autonomous lethal weapons. In addition to lowering the threshold for the emergence of new conflicts, the autonomy of weapons does not contribute to full compliance with international humanitarian law, as that requires absolute human control.

Responsibility and accountability are key. That is why, in January 2020, Ecuador joined the Franco-Mexican initiative promoting the suspension of the use of the veto in cases of mass atrocities. And, in November 2018, we signed the Code of Conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group. We continue to urge all countries to sign it.

I do not want to neglect to mention the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons. No international framework for the protection of civilians can be comprehensive and sufficient if it does not include the complete prohibition of nuclear weapons. The very existence of such weapons defies the existence of humankind. Not even the most sophisticated mechanism in the most developed country could contain or mitigate the devastating impact of nuclear weapons on the population, and so their existence is a disavowal of the protection of civilians.

Finally, I confirm that Ecuador joined in co-sponsoring draft resolution S/2021/402, which we consider a valuable tool for the Security Council's efforts in this area.

Annex 29**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Egypt to the United Nations**

We welcome the convening of this important Security Council open debate and extend our thanks to Viet Nam for this timely initiative.

The world is indeed witnessing unprecedented massive challenges with regard to protecting civilians in armed conflict. These challenges are represented in multiple and exacerbating conflicts, accompanied by an escalation of violations against civilians and waves of displacement and migration that are the largest since the Second World War. The brunt of these conflicts falls on the shoulders of civilians, especially the most vulnerable groups — women and children.

The destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and the disruption of essential services have been identified as a significant challenge for the safe return and voluntary resettlement of displaced communities. In a post-conflict context, the rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure and the restoration of essential services should be prioritized to facilitate socioeconomic recovery and peacebuilding. Owing to significant costs associated with infrastructure rehabilitation and reconstruction, assistance by international partners in capacity-building could play an essential role in supporting peacebuilding efforts. In this regard, Egypt reaffirms the importance of compliance with the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law by all parties involved in armed conflicts.

In 2016, Egypt, and other friendly countries led an initiative in the Security Council to introduce a draft resolution on medical protection in armed conflict, which was later adopted by consensus and with broad support from the international community as resolution 2286 (2016) at the very beginning of Egypt's presidency of the Security Council in May 2016. This resolution drew upon all the existing legal frameworks that bind all parties to conflict with regard to the protection of the sick and injured, medical workers, hospitals and medical facilities.

In accordance with international law, the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians rests with States. Due priority should continue to be accorded to the promotion of knowledge of, respect for, and observance by States of their obligations assumed under the Charter of the United Nations, international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In recent years, we witnessed atrocities committed by non-State actors, which calls upon the United Nations to take a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, including through its counter-terrorism efforts. In this regard, all parties to a conflict have an international obligation under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 to protect the human rights and fundamental freedoms of civilians. All parties, in particular States, must comply with the principles of distinction and proportionality in armed conflicts. All parties must refrain from targeting medical facilities and civilian objects and grant access to those providing humanitarian assistance.

Respect for the principles of sovereign equality, political independence and territorial integrity of all States and of non-intervention must also be upheld. It is imperative that a country's consent be obtained before humanitarian assistance can gain access to its territory, and that consent must always be continuously in place throughout the action of the assistance operations.

In conclusion, we would like to stress the importance of the contribution that peacekeeping missions make to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. United Nations peacekeeping missions constitute one of the most effective means available to the Organization to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict. We support

endowing such missions with the mandates and capacities needed to enable them to become more effective in providing protection. Egypt stresses that it is important for United Nations peacekeeping missions to uphold the principles of respect for host countries' sovereignty and cultural specificities. Relevant peacekeeping missions with mandates of this type should also fulfil their tasks without prejudice to the primacy of host Governments' responsibility to protect civilians.

Annex 30**Statement by the Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the United Nations**

[Original: Spanish]

We thank the Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council for organizing today's important open debate on the protection of infrastructure essential to the survival of civilian populations in conflict zones. El Salvador attaches great importance to this issue, as it is civilians who continue to represent the vast majority of victims in conflicts and who suffer the immediate, short- and long-term effects of conflict.

El Salvador regrets the increase in direct or indiscriminate attacks by parties to conflict on objects indispensable for civilian survival, including those listed as objects of protection in the Geneva Conventions, as well as other infrastructure indispensable for the provision of basic social protection services, such as, inter alia, education, health, drinking water, food, energy and places of worship, as described in the Secretary-General's latest report on the current state of the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366). It is for this reason that El Salvador strongly condemns the attacks, destruction, removal or rendering useless of objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population as being contrary to the 1977 Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, as well as for their serious short- and long-term consequences on global health, human development and peace — and because these same consequences have the capacity to cause displacement within and outside the borders of affected countries, put food security at risk and act as a catalyst for climate change.

El Salvador regrets that, despite the Secretary-General's call in March 2020 for a global ceasefire to focus attention on the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, we have seen an increase in attacks on hospitals in different countries and regions of the world, making it imperative to increase protection not only of medical facilities, but also, primarily, of humanitarian and health workers.

El Salvador recognizes that new information and telecommunications technologies represent an important opportunity to promote the economic and social development of States. However, the malicious use of these technologies extends to cyberattacks against critical infrastructure, particularly in the health and energy sectors, which are the most vulnerable to such attacks. We have seen how, during the COVID-19 pandemic, cyberattacks on national health systems have been on the rise, putting the lives of thousands of people at risk. We would take this opportunity to condemn, in particular, the cyberattacks against the World Health Organization and the phishing attempts that have taken place in recent months. The increase in interconnectivity means that these attacks could grow in coming years; further work must therefore be done to impede such attacks. In addition, international law in this area should be codified to prevent the misuse of new technologies and to recognize the interrelationship with applicable international humanitarian law, including in the field of cyberoperations during armed conflicts.

We welcome the Security Council's efforts to discuss this important threat in a substantive manner, with a view to providing effective solutions. In this regard, we welcome the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021), submitted by Viet Nam, on the protection of critical infrastructure, and urge the Council to continue these important discussions, leaving aside any political or special interests.

We must continue to work on accountability and close the door on impunity. In this regard, El Salvador considers that it is essential, in order to prevent the recurrence

of war crimes, to facilitate access to justice for victims and reparations for victims and survivors. Prosecutions for war crimes must include investigating and ultimately convicting those criminally responsible, regardless of who they are and where their crimes took place, all in accordance with applicable international criminal law. We call on States to continue to cooperate with international investigative and judicial mechanisms to reduce scenarios of impunity in this regard.

Finally, El Salvador reiterates the urgent need to continue to work on strengthening the coordination and cooperation of the United Nations and regional organizations; training members of armed forces and armed groups in international humanitarian law and international human rights law; improving capacities to monitor, investigate, prosecute and convict those guilty of having committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, acts of genocide and other violations of international humanitarian law; and providing opportunities for reparations and social reintegration for victims and survivors of these scourges.

Annex 31**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ethiopia to the United Nations, Taye Atskeselassie Amde**

I commend the successful presidency of the Security Council of Viet Nam during this month of April 2021. I also thank the Vietnamese presidency for convening today's important debate on the protection of civilians and indispensable civilian objects.

International humanitarian law encompassed in the Geneva Conventions could not be clearer with respect to the regime for the protection of civilians and civilian objects. My country has been a signatory State of the Geneva Conventions since as far back as 1949 and of the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War since 1969.

In conventional armed conflicts, which most States have experienced, we have encountered serious setbacks and gaps in implementation of these norms. Even so, the right has been distinguished from the wrong, and the international system has been in a better position to remedy the violations. However, contemporary conflicts and threats continuously evolve and take on complex dynamics. Accordingly, it is appropriate now to give proper attention to the conduct of non-State actors that wreak havoc by targeting civilians and civilian objects with a view to causing outrage and to undermining national authority. In considering these non-conventional confrontations, the international system should look beyond the immediate inclination to take an adversarial stand to the positions of national Governments, especially those in developing countries, but should find solutions based on the real geopolitical factors at play.

Not only are attacks against civilians and civilian objects a transgression against the normative framework, but they are also a crime that jeopardizes sustainable peace and hard-won development gains. It puts off peacemaking and reconciliation and risks eroding the cohesive fabric of societies. That is the reason why irresponsible actors that are fixated on causing absolute annihilation of nations engage in destruction of civilian sites, including schools, hospitals, energy-generating plants, markets and other places of exceptional public significance.

Ethiopian troops have made and continue to make enormous sacrifices in our collective mission to protect civilians in different corners of the world. Our commitment to the maintenance of international peace and security and the protection of civilians is historic and enduring.

Let me now turn to a contemporary challenge my country is facing and briefly highlight violations by non-State actors of the solemn obligation to protect civilians and civilian objects. Since early November, a treasonous group has committed all sorts of crimes against the public and attacked the Ethiopian National Defence Forces. When its futile attempt to secure victory failed, the Tigray People's Liberation Front opened an attack against civilians. This criminal group undertook a deliberate effort to destroy hospitals and health-care facilities, roads, bridges, power-transmission lines and airports, which the Ethiopian people had toiled to build. The group targeted and caused considerable destruction to civilian airports in Bahir Dar, Gondar and Axum.

The law-enforcement operation in Tigray, together with the security challenges in other parts of Ethiopia, poses a unique challenge whereby the Government is striving to protect civilians and civilian objects against orchestrated attacks by frustrated criminal groups. As a State with an independent existence and a long history of governance, Ethiopia will take the necessary measures to protect its unity

and territorial integrity. In addition, it will make the utmost efforts to protect its public from all forms of wrongdoing, including attacks by domestic criminal groups that intend to destabilize the nation.

We uphold our obligations under national and international law. Further, we will realize our obligation to bring justice and accountability to perpetrators of crimes, notwithstanding their status or affiliation. In this regard, we applaud the humanitarian assistance provided for our citizens to date and encourage friendly countries to enhance their support.

Annex 32

Statement by the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations, in its capacity as observer

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States.

The candidate countries the Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro, the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

I welcome this open debate on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, which is of utmost relevance in today's crises, as well as the adoption of resolution 2573 (2021).

The EU is deeply concerned at continued gross violations of international humanitarian law and of humanitarian principles, by the shrinking of the humanitarian space and by continued attacks on humanitarian and health-care workers. It is also concerned about the impact of the widespread and deliberate destruction or damage caused to such civilian objects as schools and hospitals in today's armed conflicts via attacks conducted in clear violation of international humanitarian law. The direct and indirect effects of this reality are one of the most critical challenges for the protection of civilians and a major driver of long-term social and economic instability and displacement. Attacks on health infrastructure have a critical impact on the survival and well-being of civilians and are currently also seriously undermining efforts to fight the coronavirus disease pandemic.

We are unfortunately witnessing this phenomenon in a number of crises today. The situation in Yemen is marked by widespread violations of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict, the scale and nature of which is shocking. Accountability for these violations is vital. Persistently indiscriminate attacks are killing and wounding civilians and damaging such critical infrastructure as health facilities, schools, markets and farms. As a result of the conflict, the economy has collapsed, and the humanitarian situation is alarming: there are over 4 million internally displaced persons; 80 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line; fewer than 50 per cent of health clinics are functioning; some 8 million children are out of school; water and electricity services are erratic and unaffordable for the large majority of population; and food security systems are under severe strain.

Restrictions imposed by parties to the conflict on humanitarian supplies and access increase the risk of famine. The current restrictions on airports, seaports and across the land, together with the continuous fighting, further impede the delivery of humanitarian aid and affect the ability of Yemeni civilians to gain access to the food, medicine and fuel essential to the survival of the civilian population. Some 16.2 million Yemenis — over half of the total population — are projected to be highly food insecure in Yemen by June 2021.

Nigeria is the country with the highest number of attacks against health facilities in West and Central Africa. It is also where more than 500 incidents affecting schools and students were recorded between 2015 and 2019. Between January 2020 and March 2021 alone, 59 episodes of violence or threats against health services were reported, including the damaging of 11 health-care facilities. Attacks on aid workers are widespread. Civilians face a high risk of seeing their human rights violated and of other violations of international humanitarian law. They are also seeing the deliberate destruction of economic assets that guarantee the population's livelihood, namely, crops and cattle, including in north-central Nigeria, in the context

of the conflict between pastoralists and farmers. In April 2021, during a series of attacks on the town of Damasak in Borno state, in north-eastern Nigeria, non-State armed groups looted and burned down private homes, warehouses belonging to humanitarian agencies, a clinic and a United Nations protection facility.

These acts are accelerating the forced displacements taking place and aggravate civilian vulnerability in crisis-affected areas. In north-eastern Nigeria, 2.2 million people have been uprooted from their homes, and in the north-west, there is a growing pattern of attacks on education establishments, including with mass abductions of pupils. In the north-eastern states of the country, regular attacks on schools, universities and students are taking place as a result of the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency.

The crisis in Syria is also a protection crisis. The EU strongly condemns the deliberate targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructures by the Syrian regime and its allies, which has been documented by the Syria Board of Inquiry. Full respect for the rights of all individuals in accordance with international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law must be observed, which includes the protection of civilians, including humanitarian and medical workers, and the protection of such civilian infrastructure as schools and hospitals. More than 13 million Syrians inside Syria — half of whom are children — are in need of humanitarian assistance.

While the need for health services remains high, as of 2021, 50 per cent of Syria's health facilities are not functioning or are only partially functioning. Further, it is estimated that 11.5 million people in Syria are being exposed to risks posed by the widespread presence of mines and explosive remnants of war. In fact, Syria is facing possibly the highest level of weapon contamination the world has seen since the Second World War, with swathes of the country turned into minefields. This means that it will take decades to make the land and cities safe again.

It is important to ensure that life-saving and life-sustaining humanitarian actions are not disrupted or targeted and that safe, full, unhindered and sustained access to the most vulnerable people in Syria is guaranteed by all routes available, including cross-border. The extension of the decision by the Security Council on the authorization for cross-border assistance in July is vital. Otherwise, humanitarian assistance to more than 3 million people will be in danger and the response to the needs of the population could be jeopardized. Faced with that reality, the international community has both a moral and a legal duty to take action.

First, the EU recalls that all parties to armed conflicts are to respect international humanitarian law and bear the primary responsibility for ensuring the protection of civilian populations and objects under their control. In that respect, the EU will continue to put international humanitarian law at the heart of its external action. The EU is committed to continuing its efforts to promote international humanitarian law comprehensively, including through training and exercises, in particular for military and security forces. The EU also works to fight impunity and to ensure accountability for violations of international humanitarian law. In that regard, we highlight the important role of the International Criminal Court (ICC). We reiterate our call on the Security Council to have the situation in Syria referred to the ICC.

Secondly, the unlawful use of certain types of weapons in specific situations may have a disproportionate and devastating effect on the natural environment, causing the degradation of agricultural land and devastating health impacts. We recall that all means and methods of warfare are to fully comply with international law, in particular international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and that those who employ such weapons are accountable and responsible for their use. Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law is crucial, particularly

when armed conflicts are increasingly fought in urban areas, exposing civilians and civilian infrastructure to substantial risks. In that respect, we recognize the challenges associated with the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas and their impact on civilians, and we call on all parties to armed conflict to fully comply with international humanitarian law.

Thirdly, five years after the adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), drafted and negotiated by Spain, together with Egypt, Japan, New Zealand and Uruguay, we need to double our efforts to ensure the implementation of the resolution and that medical facilities, and more broadly humanitarian and medical workers, are not subject to attacks in violation of international law. In that respect, I would like to recall that the EU, together with France, Germany, Mexico, Norway, the Niger and Switzerland, is organizing a discussion series on the protection of humanitarian and medical workers in armed conflict. We also need to continue to uphold the protection of schools and education infrastructure in situations of conflict, and we welcome the efforts of States Members of the United Nations that have endorsed the Safe Schools Declaration.

Fourthly, the *Global Report on Food Crises 2020* shows that conflict was to blame for 6 out of the 10 worst food crises in the world and for nearly 60 per cent of humanitarian needs. The destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, including water resources and infrastructure, may in many contexts contribute to conflict-related hunger. The EU urges all parties to armed conflicts, State and non-State alike, to fully respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the prohibition of the use of starvation of the civilian population as a method of warfare, and to allow and facilitate safe and unhindered humanitarian access. In that respect, we recall that in 2019, the Assembly of State Parties to the Rome Statute of the ICC voted unanimously to extend the war crime of starvation to non-international armed conflict.

Fifthly, strengthening the humanitarian, development and peace nexus with a needs-based, as well as a human rights-based, approach would enhance a holistic approach to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals. There is a need for donors and civil society to engage more coherently with the United Nations Common Country Analysis and Cooperation Frameworks in order to design collective outcomes ensuring that all stakeholders can enhance the delivery of durable solutions, which would enhance resilience. To respond to challenges and to build back better, we need a common understanding of the needs in each context based on joint analysis and joined-up planning and monitoring, including data and evidence-based information. It is through joint efforts that we can ensure the protection of civilian populations and the enhanced delivery of adequate gender-sensitive services.

Finally, the international community needs to take a more outspoken stance in calling on all parties to conflicts to respect international humanitarian law, condemning violations and finding political and practical solutions to protect objects that are vital to civilian populations, as well as conducting fact-finding investigations and ensuring accountability for violations. The Security Council plays a critical role in steering that forward and ensuring accountability. We count on the Security Council and the international community to support those efforts.

Annex 33**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations**

Guatemala registers its appreciation to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, as President of the Security Council for the month of April, for convening this video-teleconference open debate on the theme “Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”, as well as to all the briefers for their insightful presentations.

Over the past two decades, peacekeeping missions have progressively adapted their protection strategies, embracing a holistic approach that involves coordinated military, police and civilian interventions, including through the addition of advisers on human rights, sexual violence in conflict and child protection. Guatemala encourages troop- and police-contributing countries to take all necessary measures concerning the protection of civilians, as reflected in the consensus of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the principles of international humanitarian law. In that regard, Guatemala takes note that this interpretation is not reflected in the Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping (2019) of the Department of Peace Operations.

Guatemala reiterates that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians, as well as for the protection and promotion of human rights, rests with the host State. Within United Nations peacekeeping operations, the protection of civilians is a whole-of-mission objective that requires a comprehensive and integrated approach among civilian, police, military and corrections components in coordination with the national authorities, as well as local communities and the relevant humanitarian organizations, in order to create a protective environment for civilians.

Furthermore, my delegation reiterates that the effective protection of civilians requires well-defined, realistic and achievable mandates; political will, leadership, performance and accountability at all levels; the mobilization of adequate resources and assets; in addition to well-trained and appropriately equipped military, police and civilian personnel.

The cornerstone of this discussion is resolution 2417 (2018), which condemns acts of depriving civilians of objects indispensable to their survival. We reiterate the call on all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, including the obligation to refrain from attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. The more so in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Guatemala recalls that it is crucial to protect civilian infrastructure critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid and the provision of essential services concerning vaccinations and related medical care in situations of armed conflicts and complex humanitarian emergencies.

Protection threats are expanding and aggravating during this pandemic. United Nations peacekeeping operations, in particular, must quickly adapt and find creative solutions to fulfil their protective functions in the field. Guatemala strongly condemns the fact that some armed groups have openly attacked hospitals and COVID-19 health centres, while others have taken advantage of the pandemic and the reduced presence of the State and international actors to operate and strengthen their stronghold.

This is not the first time that peacekeeping operations have been put to the test in an epidemic. The spread of cholera by United Nations peacekeepers in Haiti and the challenges of fighting Ebola while protecting civilians in eastern Congo already

offer many lessons. One important lesson is to bolster strategic communication and carefully work on public messaging to counter hate speech, rumour and misinformation. Informing the public about COVID-19 and being transparent about the mission is affected and constrained by the virus is key.

The international community must work collectively with the aim of ensuring that the protection of civilians is at the core of all activities, including capacity-building initiatives and support to national stakeholders. All missions should work with regional, national and local actors for a cessation of hostilities and violent acts and to advocate for protection-oriented responses to the pandemic.

Guatemala will continue to provide its special forces with a mandate to protect civilians with the highest level of effectiveness and efficiency, thus fulfilling our commitment, without caveats, to contribute to maintaining and sustaining peace.

Annex 34

Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi

While the prohibition of the use of force, save the two exceptional cases authorized by the Charter of the United Nations, is a fundamental principle and a pre-emptory norm of international law, armed conflicts are still a reality of our time.

However, according to international humanitarian law, which governs the conduct of States in armed conflicts, there are certain rules that must be observed by parties to conflicts. The most prominent principles upon which international humanitarian law is founded are the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience. As also authoritatively pronounced by the International Court of Justice, “the overriding consideration of humanity” is “at the heart of” the principles and rules of law applicable in armed conflict. According to that principle, inflicting “unnecessary suffering”, even to “combatants”, is prohibited, let alone causing any suffering to civilians, the protection of whom is the prime objective of many international legally binding instruments constituting international humanitarian law.

Distinction is another principle of international humanitarian law, according to which the parties to the conflict shall distinguish between the civilian population and combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives. In addition, in accordance with article 35, paragraph 1, of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), the choices of “methods or means of warfare is not unlimited”.

Consequently, as also clearly stated by the International Court of Justice, “States must never make civilians the object of attack” and, as stipulated in article 18 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, civilian objects, such as hospitals, “may in no circumstances be the object of attack, but shall at all times be respected and protected by the parties to the conflict”.

Likewise, starvation of civilians as a method of warfare or attacking or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population must be avoided.

Those explicit norms indicate that our challenge today is not the lack of adequate binding rules for the protection of civilians or civilian objects; rather, it is the lack of compliance with such norms and, more important, the inaction of the Security Council when they are breached materially and even systematically.

A living example is the decades-long systematic inhumane and unlawful practices of the Israeli regime in the occupied territories, which cover a range of brutalities, such as deliberate systematic and massive ethnic cleansing; the demolition of homes and the confiscation of land and property of the Palestinians; the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip; and the killing of civilians, including women and innocent children, all of which are clear manifestations of war crimes.

Another example is the brutalities of Saudi Arabia in its six years of aggression in Yemen, in which thousands of civilians, including women and children, have been killed; homes, mosques, hospitals, schools, market places, diplomatic missions and even wedding and funeral ceremonies have been indiscriminately attacked; and starvation of civilians is used as a method of warfare, causing the world’s worst contemporary humanitarian crisis.

Moreover, in both cases, objects indispensable to the survival of civilians, such as foodstuffs, drinking-water installations and hospitals, have been the subject

of systematic armed attacks or deliberate disruption and civilian places, such as ports and airports, have been the subject of strict unlawful blockades.

Another case is the imposition of inhumane unilateral sanctions against Syria, which prevents the import of humanitarian goods, including food and medicine, causing serious harm to the health and lives of people. In practice, their adverse effects are equivalent to starvation and must therefore stop immediately.

While emerging methods and new means of warfare, developed as a result of technological advances, may require new rules, the development of which, according to Article 13 of the Charter, falls within the purview of the General Assembly, the existing norms on the protection of civilians and civilian objects are quite clear and sufficient.

Even if there are situations that are not covered by such norms, civilians remain under the protection and authority of “the principles of international law, as they result from the usages established between civilized nations, from the laws of humanity, and the requirements of the public conscience”, as expressly stated in the Convention with respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land of 29 July 1899 and its annex: Regulations concerning the Laws and Customs of War on Land.

Indeed, what the Security Council must do is to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian objects in armed conflicts, compel the perpetrators to bring such practices to an immediate end and hold them accountable for such crimes. That is of the utmost importance in the current circumstances, in which the adverse consequences of the coronavirus disease pandemic are exacerbating the already serious humanitarian situations in a number of conflict-ridden countries.

In addition, when certain civilian objects, such as drinking-water installations, are attacked or otherwise rendered useless, unfortunately, the main victims are children. According to UNICEF, in protracted conflicts:

“Children under 5 are more than 20 times more likely to die from diarrhoeal disease linked to unsafe water and sanitation than violence in conflict.”

It must also be stressed that, when civilian objects are attacked, destroyed or rendered useless, it seriously impedes the return and resettlement of displaced communities, as well as reconstruction efforts in post-conflict situations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its efforts to further promote awareness about the norms of international humanitarian law at the national level and to enhance their full and effective application at the international level.

Annex 35

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations

Italy would like to thank the Vietnamese presidency for organizing this open debate and aligns itself with the statement of the European Union (annex 32). We were also pleased to join the statement submitted by Switzerland on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflicts (annex 47). At the same time, we would like to make some remarks in our national capacity.

The protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population was enshrined in the Additional Protocols of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which refer to the prohibition of attacks against objects that include foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking-water installations and supplies and irrigation works. Protecting foodstuffs as well as infrastructures necessary for food production and supply and water distribution is indeed crucial for the overall protection of civilians and, therefore, also for maintaining international peace and security.

Italy is proud to be a party to all of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols on international humanitarian law and to have been among the co-sponsors of resolution 2417 (2018), which recognizes the link between hunger and conflict and condemns the use of hunger as a method of warfare.

At the same time, it must be observed that since the adoption of the two Additional Protocols, more than 40 years ago, international humanitarian law has evolved significantly. As pointed out in the latest report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366), the contemporary notion of essential infrastructure also includes hospitals and schools.

Notwithstanding resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical personnel and facilities in armed conflict, which Italy co-sponsored, in too many cases we continue to witness attacks on hospitals and frontline doctors. That is all the more unacceptable in the current pandemic scenario, where health infrastructures are not only providers of primary health-care services but also indispensable pillars of the vaccination campaign and irreplaceable tools to improve the resilience and preparedness of national health systems. From that perspective, hospitals should be considered important factors in promoting a better recovery from the pandemic.

As the Additional Protocols provide only a non-exhaustive list, it should be noted that educational facilities also represent essential infrastructures. In humanitarian crises, millions of children are deprived of access to schools, which are too often attacked or used for military purposes. UNICEF estimates that in emergency settings, education is the first service to be suspended and the last to be reactivated. Without access to education, children are at greater risk of being the victims of violence and abuse, including sexual violence, child labour, human trafficking and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage.

Dropping out of school in crisis contexts is, in most cases, a direct consequence of wartime attacks against school facilities, the military use of school buildings or the forced recruitment, use or abduction of children, mainly by non-State armed groups. That situation exposes children to disproportionately greater and prolonged suffering, which, if not adequately addressed, can undermine the human development of individuals and, consequently, the social and economic development of communities themselves. That seems particularly true during this period marked by the coronavirus disease pandemic, as school closures and limitations in accessing social and health services expose children to even greater risks of violations and abuse.

For all the aforementioned reasons, Italy is among the States that have subscribed to the 2015 Safe Schools Declaration for the protection of education from attack and is a strong advocate of its implementation. We are also willing to do our part in helping to build resilient societies, as we are aware of the crucial role of education in situations of emergency. Several humanitarian aid initiatives supported by Italian cooperation in crisis areas have consistently been dedicated to the education sector.

From a humanitarian perspective, the protection of civilians in conflict areas is also pursued through mine-action activities such as the clearing of territories of anti-personnel mines and other remnants of war; stockpile destruction; mine-risk education; medical assistance to survivors; and international advocacy activities. For that reason, Italy supports humanitarian demining activities in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Sudan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia. In that same spirit, Italy supports the draft of a political declaration aimed at protecting the civilian population from explosive weapons in densely populated areas.

The need to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population is emblematic of the multifaceted nature of today's security challenges. As our societies and economies become increasingly complex and interconnected, the growing interdependence of food production, water systems, power grids, hospitals and schools should be recognized and taken into account.

The Security Council should increase its attention to those cross-cutting issues and support a comprehensive and preventive approach to addressing their potential impact on global security. For that reason, we welcome the adoption today of resolution 2572 (2021), which Italy co-sponsored based on its convictions.

We stand ready to support an enhanced role on the part of the United Nations in identifying best practices to protect those essential infrastructures and to raise awareness of the importance of the effective application of international humanitarian law.

Annex 36**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations, Ishikane Kimihiro**

I would like to begin by thanking Viet Nam for having convened this important meeting. I would also like to thank all the briefers, including the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross, for their briefings.

As a staunch supporter of the concept of human security, Japan attaches great importance to the theme of today's debate: the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. A wide range of objects and services are indispensable, not limited to those listed in article 54 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions — foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking-water installations and supplies and irrigation works. The civilian population cannot survive without, for example, medical facilities, wastewater management and sanitary systems, and energy systems.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is striking hardest the weakest segments of society, including those people affected by armed conflict, and has brought to light the importance of maintaining essential medical services for people fighting the virus in already fragile conflict situations. The relevant medical facilities and access to medical services must be protected from attacks and destruction.

This year marks the fifth anniversary of resolution 2286 (2016) on health care in armed conflict, to which Japan contributed as a co-penholder in 2016. Despite that resolution and the subsequent resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict and hunger, adopted in 2018, it is regrettable that we continue to witness repeated attacks against medical and humanitarian personnel and their facilities in conflict zones. Most recently in February, the Council adopted resolution 2565 (2021) and urged all parties to protect infrastructure critical to the delivery of humanitarian aid for essential services concerning vaccinations and related medical care. The Security Council must use its powers to the fullest extent in order to facilitate the implementation of those resolutions.

In December 2019, Dr. Nakamura Tetsu, a representative of a Japanese humanitarian non-governmental organization, was killed in a terrorist attack along with his Afghan colleagues in the eastern part of Afghanistan, when he was travelling in a car to monitor his irrigation project. Dr. Nakamura devoted himself for decades to health-care services and agricultural development for the Afghan people. He strongly believed that peace and stability in and the reconstruction of the country cannot be achieved without building a solid basis for the food and water supply. Japan strongly condemns that heinous attack against that aid worker, whose sole motive was to assist civilians and their livelihoods.

Japan is committed to actively contributing to the protection of civilians and objects indispensable to their survival. In March, Japan made a contribution of more than \$30 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross for its emergency and rehabilitation activities in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide water services and improved access to medical care to the victims of armed conflict, for example, in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, South Sudan and Somalia. Also in March, Japan contributed approximately \$4.5 million to UNICEF's operations in Syria, including the reconstruction of water and sewerage systems, to improve access to safe water and sanitation for the population of eastern Ghouta. It also supports health clinics for women and children by providing medical equipment.

Japan is determined to continue making every effort to ensure the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in armed conflict.

We will continue to work closely with other Member States, the United Nations system, international humanitarian organizations and civil-society organizations to contribute to that endeavour.

Annex 37

Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the United Nations, Georg Sparber

Liechtenstein is grateful to Viet Nam for having organized this debate and recognizes the importance of the topic to the Security Council's work, as well as to the protection of civilians agenda as a whole.

Notably, the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as food, crops, livestock and water, is not only an outcome of conflict but also a root cause, as people are increasingly brought into conflict with one another over dwindling resources to sustain life. Attacks that result in the destruction of such objects heighten the insecurity of people, often for a long time, at times with that specific intention on the part of the perpetrators, in which case they amount to war crimes.

The Security Council has at its disposal the tools necessary to deter such actions by ensuring accountability. It must take a long-term and comprehensive perspective on security, with human security at the centre of its work. It should also consider further the contribution that the protection of civilians can make to the prevention of future conflicts and the perpetuation of ongoing ones.

The most effective way to protect civilians is by averting armed conflict in the first place, and, indeed, the goal of preventing armed conflict was the driving idea behind the creation of the United Nations. The Charter of the United Nations is clear that the use of force is in fact illegal except in narrowly defined, exceptional cases. We view the deterrent effect of the criminalization of illegal war-making as an essential part of the protection of civilians agenda.

The activation of the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) over the crime of aggression on 17 July 2018 was therefore an important step forward. We encourage all States to ratify the Kampala amendments to the Rome Statute on the crime of aggression. We would also remind Council members that the possibility of referring aggression situations to the ICC is a powerful new tool that the Council has at its disposal. In the context of the protection of civilians after an armed conflict is triggered, the Rome Statute provides that the term

“‘conditions of life’ may include, but is not necessarily restricted to, deliberate deprivation of resources indispensable for survival, such as food or medical services, or systematic expulsion from homes”.

We therefore very much welcome the decision taken by the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute in 2019 to fill a gap in the Statute by adding the starvation of civilians in non-international armed conflict to article 8 of the Statute, upon the initiative of Switzerland. Given the rapidly changing nature of warfare, it is important to also consider the relevance of cyberoperations in that discussion. To that end, Liechtenstein, together with 10 other States parties to the ICC, has created a Council of Advisers of eminent experts in international law to discuss how the Rome Statute, including its elements on the deliberate deprivation of resources indispensable for survival, applies in the context of cyberoperations. We are thankful to our partners who have joined that endeavour and look forward to forthcoming report of the Council of Advisers on the Application of the Rome Statute to Cyberwarfare.

Let me briefly mention some situations in which that topic is particularly relevant to the Council's work and should meet with the corresponding disposition of the Council to act. In Syria, the Allouk water station — the main water supply for 460,000 people — had its supply cut approximately 20 times in 2020. That led to some

parts of the region going without water for more than a week. Cuts to water supplies, which are self-evidently indispensable to survival, are extremely concerning, and Liechtenstein recalls that ultimately it is the Council's responsibility to ensure that access is consistently maintained.

Syrian Government forces have destroyed vital humanitarian aid supplies intended for its own people for many years, including as recently as last month in an airstrike on a non-governmental-organization-supported warehouse, and systematically attacked medical facilities more than 400 times since the beginning of the war. Meanwhile, the ongoing threat by some veto-wielding members of the Security Council to end the mandate for the final border crossing at Bab Al-Hawa is a direct threat to the survival of 2.8 million civilians in need in Syria's north-west.

That is one of many, albeit a particularly blatant, instance of how the constant threat and use of the veto prevents the Security Council from taking vital action. It is also a grave violation of the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group Code of Conduct enshrining the expectation of 122 States for the Council to do better in precisely those situations. The situations in Yemen and in the Tigray region of Ethiopia are also of grave concern.

While Liechtenstein welcomes the agreement between the World Food Programme and the Government of Ethiopia on humanitarian access, the situation is clearly nowhere close to ensuring that the people receive the necessary humanitarian assistance. Liechtenstein welcomes the Council's recent agreement on a press statement on the situation in Tigray (SC/14501) — an overdue reaction by the Council that we hope will soon be followed up. It should be in the primary interest of the Security Council to prevent a worsening of the humanitarian crisis and the worst-case scenario of a famine in the region.

Annex 38

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Malta to the United Nations

Malta thanks the presidency of Viet Nam for having organized this ministerial-level open debate on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations and for their efforts in negotiating resolution 2572 (2021), adopted today by the Council, which we are proud to co-sponsor. Malta also thanks today's briefers for their insightful presentations as well as for the critical work that the organizations that they represent carry out in a multitude of difficult scenarios.

Malta fully aligns itself with the statement submitted by the European Union (annex 32) while also delivering a few additional remarks in our national capacity.

This debate provides a timely, and, regrettably, much-needed, opportunity for the international community to reiterate the need for all parties involved in conflicts to respect international humanitarian law and its guiding principles, which include an obligation to ensure the protection of objects and infrastructure that are critical to the survival of the civilian population in time of hostilities.

In a variety of conflict scenarios, including Yemen, Syria, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ukraine, Afghanistan and Myanmar, we continue to witness gross violations of international humanitarian law. Among those violations we observe the widespread destruction or damage, both intentional and unintentional, of civilian objects and structures. That encompasses hospitals and related health facilities; schools and education-related facilities; civilian infrastructure, including that essential to the delivery of humanitarian aid; public service infrastructure, including water and electricity supply mechanisms; and other economic assets crucial to civilian populations' well-being, such as livestock and agricultural assets.

Damage to such indispensable objects creates a vicious circle. At the onset, essential services are disrupted, thus causing devastating harm to the civilian population. Simultaneously, such situations also plant the seed for further suffering for civilians, given the linkages between the damage suffered and the likely onset of conflict-related food and water insecurity; the increased likelihood of forced displacement; the possibility of environmental consequences due to damage to critical infrastructure; a compounded spread of infectious diseases, including due to medicine shortages; and, more broadly, the worsening of the humanitarian situation.

Worryingly, current and future trends pose even greater difficulties when seeking to safeguard objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population from damage. Let me highlight two specific scenarios.

First, urbanization and high population density, particularly in conflict situations, inevitably results in increased vulnerability for civilians and related objects, for example through the intermingling of combatants and civilians and related objects.

Secondly, the malicious use of digital technology poses further risks, as witnessed through the number of cyberattacks that have been directed at critical infrastructure, particularly in the fields of health care and energy.

In the light of such circumstances, the international community is legally compelled to recall and abide by international humanitarian law and its provisions. Let us commit to safeguarding the protections afforded to objects and infrastructure that are imperative for a civilian population's survival and to ensuring that life-sustaining humanitarian assistance continues to be delivered, without the imposition of unnecessary obstacles.

Additional specific measures that should be encouraged include the following.

In the context of medical facilities, one must recall the unanimous adoption of resolution 2286 (2016), in 2016, and its persistently relevant provisions that safeguard medical facilities and seek to ensure that humanitarian and medical workers are not subject to attack.

The same protections should be extended to educational facilities. In that vein, Malta proudly refers to its endorsement of the Safe Schools Declaration and calls on other Member States to join the 107 Members that have taken such a step.

The increasing prevalence of urban warfare necessitates a re-evaluation of previous military practice in order to ensure effective protection for the civilian population and related infrastructure. In that vein, the Republic of Malta expresses its support for the Irish-led initiative to adopt a political declaration and looks forward to constructively engaging in efforts towards the adoption of a political declaration that seeks to strengthen the protection of civilians from the impact of explosive weapons in urban areas.

Allow me to conclude by re-emphasizing Malta's proactive stance in advancing the protection of civilians in armed conflict agenda forward within the United Nations structure. Malta's co-sponsorship of the Security Council draft resolution on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population (S/2021/402), while emphasizing our desire for stronger language in terms of protecting the environment, is a manifestation of such an approach. Such an approach will serve as a guiding principle should Malta be entrusted with the responsibility to serve as a member of the Security Council in 2023-2024.

Annex 39**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun**

I wish to congratulate you again, Sir, on your able leadership as the President of the Council. I would like to thank all briefers for their comprehensive statements.

At the outset, I would like to briefly reiterate the efforts made by Myanmar to protect civilians in armed conflict, especially children, during the Administration of the democratically elected civilian Government. In July 2019, Myanmar ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict following the enactment of a new Child Rights Law, which prohibits all forms of violence against children. Apart from being a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Myanmar also signed onto criminalizing the six grave violations.

Those are the efforts and contributions made by the democratically elected civilian Government led by President U Win Myint and State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with respect to the protection of children in armed conflict.

Nevertheless, the situation in Myanmar has led to a radical shift in the efforts and contributions of the Government for the protection of civilians following the military coup on 1 February 2021. Instead, the entire people of Myanmar have been experiencing the inhumane and brutal acts committed by the military and security forces, and, furthermore, the systematic and targeted attacks of those forces on the people.

As the world is acutely aware, the military staged that coup and detained the democratically elected civilian leaders on 1 February for irrational reasons. Following the coup, the entire population of Myanmar resisted the military in different ways, including the civil disobedience movement by civil servants, nationwide peaceful protests and various types of strikes.

In order to break down the protests and suppress those who stand against the military dictatorship, the military group has been launching indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks against civilians using tear-gas bombs, rubber bullets, snipers, live ammunition, rifles, heavy weaponry such as rocket-propelled grenades and hand grenades. Those have resulted in atrocities, acts of brutality, severe human rights violations and crimes against humanity. Since the coup, as of 23 April 2021, the military and security forces had killed more than 730 people, including dozens of children, and arrested and charged more than 3,300. Furthermore, thousands were being inhumanely tortured by those forces. The death toll is rising every day.

As covered in the international and local media and social media on a daily basis, the brutal acts and atrocities being committed by the military are making the people of Myanmar feel truly helpless. That severe and horrible situation reflects the fact that the State's military and security forces have abandoned their constitutional duty to protect their civilians and, rather, are attacking and murdering their own people.

Among those murdered by the military have been peaceful protesters, those living peacefully at their residences, young people with great potential and very young children, including a 7-year-old child, a 5-year-old child and a 3-year-old child. As Myanmar is a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and a country that signed on to criminalizing the six grave violations, such horrible killings seriously violate the Convention and the agreement.

In addition, I would like to stress the arbitrary detentions, the systematic murders, the vicious torture during detention and the continued suppression, as well

as the kidnapping of family members as hostages in order to arrest wanted persons. Those inhumane, systematic and targeted acts by the military and security forces have clearly violated international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The military and security forces continue to carry out those inhumane acts in the rural and urban areas of Myanmar even as I speak.

I wish to take this opportunity to reaffirm that the military and security forces in Myanmar are seriously unwilling to protect their own civilians and instead are abandoning the duty of the host State to protect civilians. The worst thing — but it is the truth — is that Myanmar's military and security forces are attacking and murdering the civilians of their own country. That is why it is high time for the United Nations and the international community to take steps to protect the people of Myanmar without delay.

At this time, our top priorities are saving the lives of innocent civilians, protecting the people of Myanmar from the military's brutal acts and securing humanitarian assistance for the people in need.

Saving lives and preventing suffering are noble tasks for humankind. Owing to the current appalling situation in Myanmar, I should like to appeal to the international community, the United Nations and the Security Council in particular to use all means necessary to help protect the people of Myanmar from the atrocities and the brutal and inhumane acts committed by the military through collective, concrete and unified action taken in a timely and decisive manner.

I wish to express our appreciation to the delegation of Viet Nam for initiating resolution 2573 (2021), whose adoption Myanmar supported.

Annex 40

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Pakistan to United Nations

Let me begin by thanking the Permanent Mission of Viet Nam for holding this very important high-level debate of the Security Council, via video-teleconference, on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, under the agenda item on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

We also thank the Under-Secretary-General of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the President of the International Committee of Red Cross and others for their insightful briefings.

Civilians have always been the main victims of war, subjected to mass extermination, indiscriminate attacks, deportation, hostage-taking, pillage and internment; all that takes a high toll on them.

The international community has responded to the brutality of war through the codification of two sets of protection measures through international humanitarian law: first, the protection of civilians and civilian objects, and, secondly, concerning other objects specifically protected against attack.

Protecting civilians during armed conflict is therefore a cornerstone of international humanitarian law.

Article 54 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions (1977) — Protocol I — provides protection for objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, inter alia, food products, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking-water installations and supplies, and irrigation works. International humanitarian law also prohibits starvation as a means of warfare.

Despite that categorical prohibition, it is quite evident that the implementation of those laws and norms have often been observed in the breach.

The Secretary-General's 2020 annual report on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366) highlighted the fact that direct or indiscriminate attacks against homes, schools, hospitals, markets, places of worship and essential civilian infrastructure have increased manifold. According to UNICEF, such attacks impede long-term development and have an impact on an entire generation's access to education.

Empirical evidence shows that attacks on cultural and religious sites, military siege and collective punishment have often been used to advance military or political objectives in situations of foreign occupation and suppression of the right of peoples to self-determination.

Quite often such occupied territories are subjected to round-the-clock curfews, communications blackouts, the closure of educational institutions, a bar on religious and public assembly, the illegal and arbitrary detention of public figures, forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of youth, and the shutting down of local businesses and economic activity — all of which are critical to people's livelihoods and survival.

Such tactics, aimed at coercing the civilian population into submission, undoubtedly constitute violations of resolution 2417 (2018) and international humanitarian law.

The destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and the disruption of essential services have also been identified as major challenges to the safe and voluntary return of refugees.

In a post-conflict context, we must prioritize the rehabilitation and reconstruction of civilian infrastructure and the restoration of essential services, as

those measures have the potential to facilitate socioeconomic recovery and create an enabling environment for the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

Owing to the significant costs associated with infrastructure rehabilitation and reconstruction, the vast United Nations Resident Coordinator system should be utilized to help countries in post-conflict situations build the capacity needed to develop and implement good infrastructure projects.

An important issue in today's debate is how to protect civilian populations and the objects indispensable for their survival. But how can this be addressed when the suppression of the civilian population is the very object of the conflict?

The Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism has repeatedly underlined that the rationale of suppressing terrorism should not provide an escape route for the suppression of civilians seeking respect for their fundamental rights, including the right to self-determination.

The challenge of addressing gross violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are further exacerbated by the inequity in the international response. In some situations, there is a quick and even robust response. In others, the perpetrators enjoy virtual impunity to commit crimes.

The Security Council, as the primary organ of the United Nations tasked with maintaining international peace and security, must not fail to act boldly in all situations where the survival of millions of civilians caught in the vice of violence and war is threatened.

Annex 41**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Poland to the United Nations**

First and foremost, I wish to thank the delegation of Viet Nam for having selected the pertinent issue of the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population as the theme for this open debate. Let me also express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your country's successful presidency of the Security Council this month and for your quality leadership in the lively discussions held in this Chamber.

Poland aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the European Union (annex 32) and by the representative of Switzerland (annex 47) on behalf of the Group of Friends on the protection of civilians, both of which reiterate the importance of protecting civilians and essential infrastructure in conflict areas.

Poland is deeply disturbed by the scale of attacks on objects indispensable to the survival of civilians in conflict areas. Far too often these have been not just incidents but rather a deliberate tactic of war and terror adopted by combatants. Such gross violation of international humanitarian law is outrageous and intolerable.

Depriving civilians of infrastructure that is essential to their survival is particularly perilous in situations of conflict-induced famine and food insecurity. Two years ago, during Poland's presidency of the Security Council, resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict-induced food insecurity, was unanimously adopted. Today its key message of protecting humanitarian supply and access to responses to conflict-induced food insecurity appears more relevant than ever as we struggle with the widespread pressures imposed by the coronavirus disease.

Educational facilities remain the main sources of inspiration for the younger generation to realize their full potential. In that context, they constitute an indispensable condition for the development of societies, economies and humankind in general. In that light, we are gravely concerned about the increase in violence against education. We are committed to putting it to an immediate end. Towards this goal, we welcome and endorse initiatives that aim to reduce the impact of conflict on education, such as the Safe Schools Declaration.

Immediate, full and uninterrupted humanitarian access in situations of conflict is an important prerequisite to effective humanitarian action. Unfortunately, this is far from being the reality as medical and humanitarian personnel, their equipment and supplies, as well as entire hospitals and other medical facilities, continue to be targeted by armed and terrorist groups. We strongly condemn these attacks and reiterate our commitment to bringing the perpetrators of these heinous crimes to justice.

Last but not least, we would like to underscore that attacks against critical infrastructure are disproportionately affecting those most vulnerable to the detrimental consequences of armed conflicts, including persons with disabilities, women and children. We must do better to protect these groups so that their fundamental rights are safeguarded and their basic needs are met.

In conclusion, let me assure you that Poland stands ready to support any initiative within the United Nations framework to protect civilians by preventing and addressing violence committed against objects indispensable to their survival.

Annex 42**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the United Nations, Francisco Duarte Lopes**

Portugal aligns itself with the statement presented by the European Union (EU) (annex 32) and, in its national capacity, would like to add the following points.

Portugal thanks Viet Nam, in its capacity as President of the Security Council, for organizing this open debate and commends it for establishing the protection of civilians and essential infrastructure in conflict areas as one of the priorities for its Security Council term.

Deliberate attacks against unprotected civilians constitute war crimes and, in some cases, crimes against humanity, deserving due accountability. The destruction, damage or rendering useless of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population has negative impacts on the human rights and well-being of the population and ultimately on their right to life.

Portugal supports the development of comprehensive strategies for conflict prevention, namely, the promotion of sustainable development policies, aiming at consolidating peace and protecting civilians, fully respecting the primacy of political dialogue and international law.

Only with an integrated approach, based on peace and security, sustainable development and human rights can we guarantee sustainable peace. As has been broadly demonstrated since it was first included in peacekeeping mandates 21 years ago, the protection of civilians must be regarded as a cross-cutting priority throughout the conflict cycle.

One of the fundamental principles of protection of civilians mandates in peacekeeping is that protecting civilians is the primary responsibility of Governments. Peacekeepers with a mandate to protect civilians have the authority and responsibility to provide protection where a Government is unable or unwilling to protect. Therefore, the protection of civilians is a fundamental pillar of conflict prevention and peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

Objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population are protected under article 54 of the Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which prohibits the attacking, destruction, removal or rendering useless of such objects.

Discussions on specific sub-themes of protection of civilians are important, as they allow for a more detailed analysis of areas and issues of concern, resulting in more targeted strategies. In this specific case, the protection of indispensable objects has a cross-cutting impact on the overall objective of protecting civilians. Moreover, it carries positive externalities by allowing us to address other related agendas, such as the women and peace and security and children and armed conflict.

Attacks on schools have a particularly long-lasting effect, risking the future of entire generations and disproportionately affecting girls. In this context, the Safe Schools Declaration is a pivotal document, as is resolution 1998 (2011), urging parties to refrain from actions that hinder children's access to education and to health services. Portugal is proud of the role it played in the resolution's adoption during its term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council from 2011 to 2012.

Moreover, addressing specific sub-themes of the protection of civilians is particularly relevant as new challenges emerge and conflicts become more complex. Protecting indispensable objects becomes a key task in the context of urban warfare, climate change and terrorism.

In regard to material loss, the destruction of health and educational facilities is perhaps one of the most evident and harmful consequences of conflicts. However, conflicts can have much broader, complex and pernicious implications in terms of destruction, damage or the rendering useless of essential objects. For instance, attacks on foodstuffs, crops, livestock, safe water and sanitation, as well as waste facilities, energy grids and key mobility infrastructure, such as airports, railways and main access routes, health and educational facilities, severely compromise the immediate and long-term well-being of populations. As such, already complex conflict situations quickly evolve into extremely dire humanitarian crises. This results in forced displacement, food insecurity and malnutrition, the propagation of infectious diseases, unmet medical needs and the obstruction of education opportunities. From this perspective, this is as destructive as direct violence and attacks on the population.

The destruction, damage or rendering useless of indispensable objects has other significant implications within protection of civilians mandates by hindering humanitarian assistance.

In the light of the above, the adoption of resolution 2341 (2017) was key in establishing the protection of critical infrastructure against terrorist threats and enhancing international and regional cooperation. Resolution 2417 (2018) drew attention to the link between armed conflict and conflict-induced food insecurity; called on all parties to conflict to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law regarding the protection of civilians; and condemned the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare and the unlawful denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations.

Despite the Secretary-General's call for an immediate global ceasefire in March 2020 to focus on the fight against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), ongoing conflicts continue to harm populations worldwide. In this sense, resolution 2565 (2021) was pivotal in calling for strengthened international cooperation to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict and post-conflict situations, and during complex humanitarian emergencies.

I would like to share some ideas in view of some of the guiding questions of this debate.

With a view to supporting the host Government in its primary responsibility to protect civilians, it is important to engage in dialogue and political advocacy, such as support for reconciliation, peace agreements or mediation, and capacity-building.

In the light of challenges, such of urbanization, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, it is of the utmost importance that protection of civilians mandates in peace operations include clear objectives, as well as comprehensive, integrated and cross-cutting strategies directed to the entire conflict cycle that take into account the slow pace of rehabilitation and reconstruction processes in the post-conflict phase. The protection of indispensable objects should include a preventive, as well as a reconstruction, dimension. The protection of indispensable objects must be considered in post-conflict, rehabilitation and reconstruction phases as an important component in socioeconomic recovery and peacebuilding.

It is essential to guarantee and reinforce training for all members of peacekeeping operations. This includes training in international humanitarian law within armed forces, an obligation under customary international humanitarian law, as well as under the Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. The Security Council and the General Assembly have repeatedly recalled such obligation.

Establishing dialogue and contacts with local actors facilitates the implementation of protection of civilians mandates, particularly regarding the

protection of indispensable objects, as these actors have a unique understanding of the challenges and needs on the ground.

It is also important to strengthen partnerships with international partners for humanitarian assistance and capacity-building. The International Committee of the Red Cross, for instance, is a key actor in the humanitarian and international framework.

Monitoring and reporting processes are fundamental for decision-making on the ground, enabling more targeted strategies.

Finally, promoting accountability and fighting impunity must reflect the consequences of the destruction, damage or rendering useless of indispensable objects, and not just the consequences of direct violence.

Portugal remains committed to the defence of international humanitarian law and humanitarian aid principles and reaffirms the importance of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which provides a common vision that guides the action of the EU in humanitarian aid.

The Portuguese presidency of the EU Council, under its humanitarian programme, is highlighting the importance of compliance with international humanitarian law, of respecting and safeguarding humanitarian principles, and of guaranteeing humanitarian access in conflict situations. This includes ensuring the protection of civilians in armed conflicts and the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Those issues will also remain, I assure you, relevant priorities for our action in the scope of the United Nations.

Annex 43**Statement by the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations, Cho Hyun**

At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening today's timely open debate on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

To date, the international community has consistently emphasized the need to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, crops, drinking water installations, energy systems and medical facilities during armed conflicts. Unfortunately, however, we are witnessing how even today armed conflicts and attacks have a direct and indirect effect on such objects, and their consequences warrant the ongoing attention and collective action of the international community. The protection of civilian objects is important not only for fulfilling the humanitarian needs of civilians in armed conflicts, but also for their post-conflict resilience and peacebuilding.

Furthermore, the ever-changing reality of conflicts caused by the pandemic, new technology, the urbanization of armed conflict and other new factors further aggravates the situation in various complex ways. The importance of ensuring the protection of civilian objects in armed conflicts has been recognized and documented on many occasions, including in the 2020 report of the Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366) and in many resolutions, such as 2175 (2014), 2286 (2016), 2417 (2018) and 2565 (2021). I would also like to reiterate our support for the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire announced on 23 March 2020 and resolution 2532 (2020), against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis.

The international community has strived to establish principles and guidance for the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population. Attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless such objects is prohibited by international humanitarian law, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Protocols Additional. The Security Council, in its numerous resolutions and statements, has also stressed the need to respect international law by parties to armed conflict, including the protection of civilians and civilian objects and safeguarding humanitarian assistance to those in need. Parties to armed conflicts, including non-State armed groups, should be mindful of these laws and act in accordance with them.

The Republic of Korea reiterates its commitment to continuing to support the efforts of the international community, including the United Nations, in this area. We have continued our efforts in this regard, including reflecting the norms concerned in our national laws, manuals and guides of the relevant agencies and entities.

Moreover, noting the economic and social challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Republic of Korea has made significant contributions under the "ODA Korea: Building TRUST" programme to enhance the comprehensive resilience of developing countries, supporting their education, business and social safety nets, and has contributed \$5 million to the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund.

The Republic of Korea will continue to join hands with the United Nations and the international community in its effort to protect objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Annex 44**Statement by the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, Mathu Joyini**

I thank the presidency of Viet Nam for convening this ministerial-level open debate on the theme “Protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population”, under the item entitled “Protection of civilians in armed conflict”. Let me also thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Mr. Peter Maurer and Mr. Kevin Rudd for their briefings.

The protection of civilians has been the focus of ongoing discussions and debates at the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies for decades, yet we continue to see violations of international humanitarian law and untold suffering. The objectives of international humanitarian law and those of the Security Council overlap in that both attempt to bring peace to civilian populations.

Armed conflict continues to have a devastating impact on civilian lives, especially women, children and youth who are disproportionately affected by armed conflict. In some cases, these indiscriminate attacks lead to civilians being forced to flee their homes, leading to high numbers of internationally and internally displaced persons. This has resulted in these vulnerable populations requiring humanitarian assistance to survive.

South Africa remains concerned regarding the current global humanitarian situation, which has deteriorated, primarily owing to armed conflict and other emerging threats, such as climate-induced conflict. Adding to this, COVID-19 has further compounded the humanitarian situation in conflict situations.

Protracted armed conflict undermines the efforts of affected States to repair and maintain essential civilian infrastructure resulting in a lack of provision of essential services to civilians for longer periods. In this regard, it is important for the Security Council to work closely with regional and international partners to address these challenges. In this regard, South Africa emphasizes the importance of quick impact projects and other peacebuilding activities focused on institution building, which have proven useful in alleviating the plight of civilians in need.

Today, 27 April, marks 27 years of freedom since South Africa defeated apartheid. As South Africans celebrate Freedom Day today, we are reminded that freedom cannot be truly achieved if civilian populations are in danger owing to attacks on objects indispensable to their survival.

Therefore, South Africa condemns any forms of restrictions on humanitarian access and the deprivation of civilians of objects indispensable to their survival. We also condemn the use of hunger and starvation as a tactic of war in armed conflict, as well as the wilful obstruction of the provision of essential services to populations in need.

This debate reminds us that the primacy of international humanitarian law is to protect the civilian population and their property infrastructure in order to avert humanitarian crises and catastrophes. Parties to conflict have the responsibility to ensure the protection of essential civilian infrastructure, such as food systems and markets, health and education facilities, energy systems, transport routes, including international airports and water and sanitation installations. It is also crucial for host States to ensure that safe access to essential civil services is uninterrupted.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Protocols Additional thereto of 1977 form the cornerstone of international humanitarian law. As signatories to the Geneva Conventions, every State has the obligation to protect civilians, and failure to do so

results in humanitarian crises, catastrophes and human suffering. Furthermore, such failure poses a threat to food security and nutrition, especially in conflict situations where humanitarian corridors are deliberately blocked or destroyed to deny access to both food aid and humanitarian health personnel to the affected population and vulnerable groups.

The violation of international humanitarian law and the specific use of starvation as a method of warfare ultimately endanger civilians and reduce access to essential services. This automatically deprives civilian populations of their liberty and their basic fundamental human rights and freedoms. We therefore call on all parties to armed conflict, including armed opposition groups, to bear responsibility for ensuring that civilians and objects indispensable to their survival be protected. Those who do not fulfil their obligations to international humanitarian law must be held accountable for those violations. Furthermore, we urge affected States to bring the perpetrators to justice, and for the Security Council to continue designating perpetrators for targeted sanctions.

All parties to conflict must comply with the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the principle of distinction and proportionality and the obligation to take all the necessary precautions to avoid harm and danger to civilians and civilian objects. Alongside this, it is critical that international humanitarian law be applied consistently and in an impartial manner. No country or party to a conflict can be above the law.

The Security Council has made progress on the protection of civilians, since the landmark adoption of resolution 1265 (1999), in terms of translating mandated peacekeeping missions into effective action on the ground. However, numerous limitations at the strategic and operational levels remain a challenge. These challenges negatively impact the capability of peacekeeping missions to fulfil their protection of civilian priority tasks. In this regard, it is crucial that the Security Council carefully consider each specific conflict situation and ensure that clearly defined mandates, adequate resources, capabilities and assets be made available, as applicable, to enable peacekeeping missions to successfully complete their protection of civilian mandates.

We hope that the ongoing Action for Peacekeeping plus initiative process will take into account the need to review some of the challenges besetting United Nations peacekeeping operations in discharging their protection of civilians mandate, including protecting objects indispensable to the survival of the civilians.

South Africa recognizes the critical role of early warning and intelligence-gathering in the prevention of attacks on critical civilian infrastructure. In this regard, we emphasize the establishment of such systems in order to allow for early and quick response to any threats. This will require close coordination between the security apparatus of the host State and the peacekeeping missions in order to effectively respond to imminent threats to civilians and essential infrastructure.

South Africa would like to stress the need to ensure the safety and protection of humanitarian and health workers in order to ensure the continuation of their essential work, and to further urge parties to conflict to prioritize the safety of such workers. In this regard, South Africa urges the international community to continue to deepen its support, in particular funding, for host States' efforts to provide protection to civilians in conflict situations.

South Africa would like to express its appreciation to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for its unwavering commitment to preserving human lives and upholding human dignity. We commend the ICRC's ongoing work to reach people who are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and relief. We

hope that the ICRC will work closely with the African Humanitarian Agency once it is operational, a practical African Union response to humanitarian challenges on the continent.

In conclusion, we would like to propose that the Security Council consider a thematic draft resolution that addresses protecting objects indispensable to the survival of civilian populations, as currently there are myriad resolutions that partially address issues under this theme. This will allow the Council to monitor the implementation of its decisions on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population.

Annex 45**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations, Agustín Santos Maraver**

[Original: Spanish]

Spain thanks the Vietnamese presidency of the Security Council for holding this open debate on the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population and aligns itself with the statement submitted on behalf of the European Union (annex 32).

Upholding international humanitarian law and conducting humanitarian activities based on the principles of impartiality, independence, neutrality and humanity are priorities in Spain's foreign policy. Our collaboration in drafting resolution 2286 (2016), exactly five years ago, demonstrates Spain's firm commitment to protecting the origins of international humanitarian law: the mission of medical personnel in armed conflict.

At the same time, the various levels of protection that international humanitarian law grants to civilian facilities justifies my Government's determined commitment to protecting education in emergencies and to supporting the Safe Schools Declaration and the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict. Spain organized the third Conference of Safe Schools, in Palma de Mallorca in 2019, and the first Safe Schools Declaration implementation seminar, in Madrid just a few weeks ago, with the participation of officials from 19 States. In that context, the Director of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation announced Spain's commitment to leading the technical implementation of the Declaration, together with Norway and Argentina.

In addition to hospitals and schools, we must be increasingly attentive to, and protective of, critical civilian infrastructure indispensable to survival amid armed conflicts, such as access to water, natural resources, food, crops and power-generation and -distribution infrastructure.

Protecting the environment is a priority for all countries in the twenty-first century. Safeguarding the environment will not only help protect civilians during conflict but facilitate an end to conflict and recovery from it, helping to create more resilient societies. Spanish humanitarian action is committed to mainstreaming the environment throughout its interventions and participates in projects committed to zero waste from medical deployments. Disasters linked to the adverse effects of climate change are on the rise. They have significant humanitarian consequences, such as forced displacement and migration, the destruction of livelihoods and exacerbated needs, and ultimately lead to cycles of violence and conflict.

When it comes to preventing attacks, we must continue promoting tools and mechanisms that can help prevent civilian casualties, such as the humanitarian notification mechanism, preventive data collection and investigations and dialogue on international humanitarian law with non-State actors that makes clear the responsibility to protect is incumbent upon all parties.

Spain is a staunch defender of the International Fact-Finding Commission, a standing body under Protocol Additional I, of 1977, to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, on the protection of victims of international armed conflicts, in carrying out investigations into acts that constitute a serious violation of international humanitarian law.

We also support the work of the International Criminal Court and promote cooperation between the Court and the Security Council. Protecting victims is a

priority for Spain and, in this regard, my Government contributes to the Trust Fund for Victims of the International Criminal Court.

Finally, I should like to highlight the training and capacity-building that our armed forces and State security forces and bodies undergo in international humanitarian law, as well as the various indicators integrated throughout our current humanitarian strategies, including on protection, to ensure that Spanish personnel and our local partners are knowledgeable of, and trained in, international humanitarian law.

Annex 46

Statement by the Permanent Mission of Sweden to the United Nations

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Nordic countries, namely, Finland, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and my own country, Sweden.

We would like to thank the Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for organizing this debate on such a timely issue, as well as the briefers for their informative remarks.

The devastating impact of armed conflicts on the civilian population is exacerbated by failures to protect the very objects upon which civilians rely to survive, that is, food, sanitation, medical care and other essential civilian infrastructure, such as electrical and water systems. The military use of, and attacks on, educational facilities is increasingly denying children their right to education and depriving them of the protective environment schools provide, putting their health and lives at risk.

International humanitarian law provides specific legal protections for such objects, which are indispensable for the survival of the civilian population. International humanitarian law prohibits attacking, destroying, removing or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the population, including through cyber-means and methods of warfare. These rules must be respected by all parties and in all circumstances.

The continuing attacks on medical care in armed conflict, despite international humanitarian law obligations, is concerning, particularly given the unprecedented challenges and vulnerabilities since the onset of the coronavirus disease pandemic. The pandemic has demonstrated the need for compliance with these rules, not least the obligations to protect health-care workers and facilities in armed conflict set out under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the obligations applicable to such workers and facilities under the Protocols Additional thereto of 1977 and 2005. We also call for the full implementation of resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of health care.

In this regard, we would like to commend the important efforts made by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to find concrete ways forward to assist States in improving respect for the obligation to protect health care in armed conflict through the publication of the factsheet *Respecting and Protecting Health Care in Armed Conflicts and in Situations Not Covered by International Humanitarian Law*, which the Government of Sweden funded. We encourage all States to benefit from that guidance document.

The landmark resolution 2417 (2018) emphasizes the link between armed conflict, conflict-induced food insecurity and the threat of famine. It also states that using the starvation of civilians as a method of warfare may constitute a war crime. Resolution 2417 (2018) calls on all parties to fully comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and to spare farms, markets, mills, storage sites and other infrastructure needed for food production and distribution. In December 2019, the Rome Statute was amended to include the war crime of using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in non-international armed conflicts.

Armed conflicts also pose threats to the environment that can have a detrimental effect on local populations. The recently updated ICRC *Guidelines on the Protection of the Natural Environment in Armed Conflict* provides valuable guidance on concrete measures that can be adopted to better protect the environment in armed conflicts. In addition, the ongoing work of the International Law Commission on the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts is compiling and clarifying the relevant norms of international law.

Both the direct and the indirect impact of armed conflict can have long-term effects on the civilian population and can be devastating. Damage to, or the destruction of, infrastructure that enables the delivery of essential services can hinder humanitarian efforts, which in turn can lead to more protracted conflicts. Mines and other explosive devices that are left behind exacerbate threats to civilians. They curb the prospects for reconstruction and socioeconomic development by preventing access to basic services and productive land use and by hindering safe returns of displaced communities. A more coherent and systematic approach to the protection of civilians is needed.

The legal protections provided by international humanitarian law, as we all know, are only as effective as their implementation, enforcement and structures for accountability. A genuine and concerted effort to comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including by protecting objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, as well as strengthening accountability for serious violations of the law, remains imperative to ensure the protection of civilians.

Annex 47**Statement by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations**

I am honoured to take the floor on behalf of members of the Group of Friends of the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict: Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, the Dominican Republic, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Japan, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, Uruguay and Switzerland.

We thank the Permanent Mission of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for organizing today's discussion, and we thank the briefers for their insightful comments. We appreciate the guiding questions in the concept note (S/2021/335, annex) and would like to make three points in response.

First, we would like to emphasize that international humanitarian law obligations in relation to objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population are intrinsically linked with the protection of the very same civilian population using the objects. International humanitarian law, notably its principles of distinction and proportionality as well as precaution in attack, imposes important limitations for the conduct of hostilities during armed conflicts and prohibits attacks on civilian objects and objects indispensable for the survival of the civilian population. Ensuring respect for these fundamental norms by all parties to armed conflicts is of paramount importance.

Secondly, in addition to the direct and immediate effects that may result from the acts of parties to armed conflicts, there may be long-term and indirect effects. These can result in food insecurity as well as the deterioration of infrastructure and service systems in protracted conflicts — due to, for example, lack of access and maintenance. Entire health and educational systems collapse, depriving generations of children of their futures. This has to be countered by a holistic approach by Member States, parties to armed conflict, the Security Council and the wider United Nations system that addresses the root causes of armed conflict, underscores respect for international humanitarian law, mitigates the consequences of the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of civilian population and includes preventive measures to avoid destruction in the future.

Thirdly, the Group of Friends emphasizes the fundamental importance of accountability in deterring perpetrators of violations and in securing justice for victims. In December 2019, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was amended to include the war crime of intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare by depriving them of objects indispensable to their survival, including wilfully impeding relief supplies in non-international armed conflict. The Council can now refer to the Court situations of international and non-international armed conflict where this crime appears to have been committed. The Group of Friends encourages States parties to the Rome Statute to consider the ratification of this amendment. It also calls on Member States to address these acts in their national legislation, as appropriate, and to investigate them, in line with resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict and hunger.

Annex 48**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu**

I would like to thank you for organizing this meeting and putting emphasis on the crucial topic of the protection of civilians and civilian objects, at a time when millions in need are beyond our reach, while critical infrastructure and services are disrupted on a regular basis.

According to the United Nations, the last four years have seen the highest recorded increase in humanitarian needs. The combination of conflicts, climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated the already fragile situation in humanitarian settings.

Today, one in 33 people worldwide is in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. The number of people displaced due to conflict and violence has almost reached an unprecedented 80 million.

In his latest report on the protection of civilians (S/2020/366), the Secretary-General indicates the importance of protecting health-care workers and essential infrastructure, as well as facilitating the rapid, unimpeded and safe access of humanitarian assistance. Strengthening respect for international law and ensuring accountability for serious violations remain pressing challenges for the protection of civilians.

While the world is going through a devastating global health crisis, indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools, marketplaces and electrical and water systems, have further aggravated the situation of vulnerable people.

The World Health Organization reports over 300 confirmed attacks on health-care facilities in emergency-affected countries and fragile settings in 2020.

Such an incident occurred only very recently in Syria, where the regime targeted the United Nations-supported and deconflicted Al-Atarib hospital on 21 March. This barbaric attack killed and injured innocent civilians. The records show that at least two aid workers and eight medical personnel are killed every month in Syria.

Respecting international humanitarian law also entails protecting humanitarian workers and civilian infrastructure. The United Nations deconfliction mechanism is an indispensable instrument to that end. Turkey will continue to be fully engaged with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the implementation of this mechanism, and we call on all relevant countries to do the same.

While conflicts have displaced more than 30 million children around the world, children in Syria remain among the most affected, due to the war that has been ongoing for more than 10 years. According to UNICEF, one in three schools in Syria can no longer be used because it has been destroyed or damaged or is being used for military purposes. Such attacks have an impact on an entire generation's access to education.

Terrorist organizations exploit instabilities and attempt to disseminate their separatist ideology and gain legitimacy. The Secretary-General has revealed on different occasions the tactics of the terrorist organization Kurdistan Workers' Party/People's Protection Units (PKK/YPG) in Syria, including but not limited to imposing arbitrary school curricula, arresting teachers and blocking humanitarian aid.

This terrorist organization is also responsible for cutting electricity to the Allouk water station, in north-eastern Syria, and obstructing its proper functioning.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the need for electricity in the region to a critical level, these repeated power cuts severely affect health services in the region.

The destruction or damaging of energy systems has long-term effects, since rebuilding or rehabilitating energy infrastructures requires comprehensive infrastructure work and substantial resources. Energy systems and infrastructure must be considered objects indispensable to civilian populations and must benefit from special protection under international humanitarian law.

The PKK's evil agenda in Iraq and the consequences of its arbitrary control over almost 800 villages in the north of the country are also alarming. The local population has been raising concerns regarding the significant lack of infrastructural and basic services in these terrorist-controlled areas. The PKK's policy of forcibly removing locals from these areas or preventing them from cultivating their lands needs to be condemned by the international community. The ongoing suffering of the Yazidi community in camps for internally displaced persons, who are unable to return to their ancestral homes in the Sinjar region due to the repressive and violent presence of the PKK and its affiliates, is a case in point.

While conflicts take massive tolls on people's lives, Turkey, as one of the leading humanitarian actors, continues to contribute to international humanitarian assistance efforts across a wide geography.

The medical assistance that we have provided to 157 countries since the start of the pandemic is in addition to our regular humanitarian aid programming around the globe. Some 129 of these countries have received donations of medical and other critical equipment and 50 countries have received cash grants, while 75 have been issued permits for purchase or export of medical equipment.

We have also supported the health-care infrastructure in a number of countries, including those that have been affected by armed conflicts, either by building or renovating hospitals, providing field hospitals or contributing to the capacity-building of the local health-care workforce.

In north-western Syria, in accordance with the trilateral agreement on the fight against COVID-19, the Turkish Red Crescent Society, OCHA and the World Health Organization continue to deliver health aid and related items, which have so far amounted to approximately \$8.1 million. As part of our efforts to restore life in northern Syria and recover infrastructure targeted by the Syrian regime and the terrorist organization PKK/YPG, we continue to repair and construct hospitals and to establish mobile health-care centres.

While we host 20 per cent of the refugee population worldwide, with about 4 million Syrians who have taken refuge in Turkey, we extend our helping hand also to millions of vulnerable Syrians across our borders on a daily basis through United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations.

The continuation of these lifeline services will be a litmus test for the Security Council in July, when its members will decide on the fate of millions of innocent civilians. If these operations stop, not only the Syrian people, but the whole region and beyond will face a humanitarian catastrophe, with grave security and other repercussions.

We call on the Council to uphold its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security and to renew the mandate of the United Nations cross-border humanitarian mechanism with additional crossing points without delay.

There can be no excuse for targeting innocent civilians and civilian infrastructure. We must hold perpetrators accountable and put an end to the

impunity that continues to threaten peace and security at the global level. Genuine accountability mechanisms play a key role in this regard.

We welcome the work of the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism in Syria and the establishment of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar. The recent ruling of the International Criminal Court on its jurisdiction over the occupied Palestinian territories is an important legal step to ensure accountability and justice in the face of grave crimes and violations of international law.

General Assembly resolution ES-10/20, on the protection of the Palestinian civilian population, adopted during Turkey's Summit presidency of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, is also an important example of the international efforts to strengthen deterrence against acts of violence and disproportionate use of force against Palestinian civilians.

International humanitarian law is at the centre of protection. The Geneva Conventions of 1949 provide a clear framework for ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law, which includes neutral, impartial and unimpeded humanitarian action. We should respect and make use of this framework.

On the other hand, it is more urgent than ever that the global ceasefire appeal of the Secretary-General be implemented so as to help create conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and for the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure in the most pressing settings.

Annex 49**Statement by the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, Sergiy Kyslytsya**

I would like to express my appreciation to the presidency of Viet Nam for convening this important debate on the current state of and challenges to the protection of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in armed conflict, including the implications of the global coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. I am proud to recall that, back in 2017, Ukraine, as an elected member of the Security Council, initiated the Council's first-ever resolution on the protection of critical infrastructure (resolution 2341 (2017)), which is closely linked to today's discussion.

This debate is a timely one, since armed conflicts continue to pose a wide range of threats to civilian populations in urban and rural areas. The international community should ensure the full protection of objects that are vital to the survival of civilians, including in the context of emerging challenges related to new technologies and weaponry, climate change and the environmental consequences of armed conflicts.

Ukraine welcomes the Secretary-General's report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict (S/2020/366), as well as his timely initiatives aimed at mitigating the security consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The call for an immediate global ceasefire — which Ukraine, whose population suffers from ongoing foreign armed aggression, immediately supported — is directly linked to today's discussion.

There is still an urgent need to change our approach to the issue of accountability and to strengthen collective responsibility to prevent, stop and ensure the non-repetition of attacks against civilians in conflict situations. Unfortunately, this task remains unimplemented, despite its enduring relevance. Ukraine has become a prime example of the consequences of violations, by one of the permanent members of the Security Council, of norms and principles of international law, including international humanitarian law. As a result, each year since 2014 has recorded unprecedented numbers of losses among civilians caused by the Russian aggression against my country. Accountability for each loss of life should be established. This is one of the main preconditions to achieving a sustainable settlement of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

For more than seven years, the Russian aggression has continued to take the lives of civilians and to destroy critical infrastructure in my country. This international armed conflict has turned the subject of the protection of civilians and objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population in the temporarily occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, from an academic topic into a very practical and daily issue for my country.

The armed conflict continues to affect the enjoyment of economic and social rights by the civilian population, especially by more than 5 million residents of the conflict-affected areas and internally displaced persons. To date, Ukraine has experienced the devastating consequences of damage or destruction due to the shelling of civilian infrastructure by the Russian occupation forces, as well as the use of civilian facilities for military purposes. The dire humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions continues to deteriorate. Furthermore, the harassment by the Russian Federation of commercial vessels passing under the illegally constructed Kerch Strait bridge between Russia and temporarily occupied Crimea and its restriction of international shipping there, with the most recent illegal closure of a part of the Black Sea leading to the Strait, have further aggravated the security, economic and social situations.

More than 80 per cent of the enterprises and critical public infrastructure damaged in Donbas belong in the “dangerous” or “very dangerous” categories of environmental risk.

Due to discontinued power supply, destroyed infrastructure, disabled pumping equipment and other causes, 39 of the region’s mines have been flooded. The flooding may have resulted in the acidification and mobilization of heavy metals into the local groundwater and riverine environment, with potentially significant impacts on human health and wildlife. Some of the flooded mines were earlier used as waste-storage facilities.

It is a matter of particular concern that there is a danger of flooding at the site of an underground nuclear test, carried out in 1979 by the Soviet regime in the Yunkom coal mine near the occupied city of Yenakiyev. This presents a real risk of radioactive contamination spreading to groundwater, rivers and, ultimately, to the Sea of Azov.

In the context of the spread of COVID-19, the state of protection of the life and health of civilians in the temporarily occupied territories has become ever more alarming and needs the special attention of the international community.

As a party to the conflict, Russia persists in disregarding its duty, as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law, to ensure and maintain the public health of the population and uses the recent aggravation of the humanitarian situation as a smokescreen for further attacks on the rights and freedoms of the residents of Crimea.

The spread of the pandemic did not stop the Russian authorities from announcing another conscription into the occupying army of the Russian Federation, which constitutes a war crime.

In addition, Russia continues to block the proper and unhindered access of international monitoring missions, primarily those of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, to the occupied territories.

The dangerous trend of Russia’s abdication of its legal obligations has to be duly reflected and assessed in the Secretary-General’s next thematic report on the protection of civilians.

Ukraine pays special attention to issues related to compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights in armed conflicts, as well as to those of preventing and responding to forced displacement and of protecting women, children and all vulnerable persons affected by armed conflict.

As a party to core international instruments related to the protection of civilians, Ukraine is committed to constantly promoting and supporting all efforts aimed at strengthening their implementation and advocating respect for human rights and international humanitarian law at both the bilateral and the multilateral levels.

Annex 50**Statement by the Permanent Mission of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations**

The United Arab Emirates would like to thank Viet Nam for organizing this important and timely open debate and Mark Lowcock, Peter Maurer and Kevin Rudd for their briefings.

The United Arab Emirates strongly supports an enhanced focus in the Security Council on preventative and reactive measures to protect infrastructure that enables civilian to survive conflict and recover from it. It is also important that approaches to this issue take into consideration the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and climate change.

First and foremost, current international humanitarian law provides a robust framework on this topic; it must be upheld. As this debate underscores, that recognition must be our collective starting point.

With that in mind, the United Arab Emirates would like to outline five options that potentially could improve outcomes around protection.

First, the United Arab Emirates views deconfliction mechanisms as the best practice for identifying and protecting civilian objects. These mechanisms establish a common understanding of such objects, reflecting the cardinal principle of distinction, and enable tracking of the status over time. New technology in this space, especially the utilization of satellite data, could be used to enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of these mechanisms, and thus ultimately protect greater numbers.

Secondly, the application of gender, age and disability in identifying, protecting and restoring such objects will result in better outcomes by serving the full needs of society. This is the basis for sustainable peace and recovery. In the United Nations system, the United Arab Emirates advocates for the allocation of dedicated budgets for gender, age and disability advisers across peace and security operations, as well as mandatory markers, as impactful and lowest-cost interventions.

Thirdly, greater resilience can be achieved through the strengthening of physical and social infrastructure and services prior to and during conflict. Systems lacking resilience experience the greatest disruptions to basic services and human health. The challenges posed by the pandemic and climate change underscore this point.

Accordingly, the United Arab Emirates has facilitated the global distribution of personal protective equipment and COVID-19 vaccine shots through bilateral and multilateral partnerships, including the United Nations supply hub in Dubai and United Arab Emirates pro-bono partnerships with the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility on logistics. The United Arab Emirates understands the importance of building resilience by investing in global health systems.

Similarly, it is critical to help communities cope with the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The United Arab Emirates advocates for the United Nations and international financial institutions to prioritize spending in areas that are both are climate-vulnerable and have had incidents of conflict and insecurity. For example, supporting farmers in the Sahel at scale on heat-resistant crops and water management would address both climate adaptation needs and roots causes of conflict.

In this vein, the United Arab Emirates also supports a sharper focus on environmental stewardship and positive infrastructure legacy in United Nations

peacekeeping operations as economic engines in host countries. The United Arab Emirates therefore commends the leadership of the Secretariat in committing to 80 per cent renewable energy usage by 2030, notably through the second phase of the Department of Operational Support's environment strategy for field missions.

Moreover, approaches to strengthen civilian objects must prioritize gender, age and disability. For instance, sexual and reproductive health needs are specific to women and girls, and so these services must be funded and protected. To this end, the United Arab Emirates pledged \$2 million for the United Nations Population Fund as part of a \$10 million package on a programme on sexual and gender-based violence in support of Rohingya women refugees' access to essential health services, especially for those who are victims of sexual violence.

Fourthly, the United Nations and the Security Council's approach to conflict must include planning for reconstruction, in particular the rebuilding of critical infrastructure to manage the reverberations of armed conflict. The United Arab Emirates has been proud to support reconstruction in Iraq, notably for Yazidi women, and has seen at first hand the importance of a continued focus on civilian objects indispensable despite the cessation of hostilities.

And fifthly, the ultimate goal for protecting civilian objects is the cessation of hostilities. The United Arab Emirates therefore takes this opportunity to renew its support to the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in order to allow for the delivery of COVID-19 humanitarian assistance, including vaccines, to the most vulnerable. The United Arab Emirates reiterates its commitment to upholding international humanitarian law and to constructively addressing threats to objects indispensable to the survival of civilians.
